

Giving glory to God

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[0 : 00] Psalm 115, what a coincidence. Today is the 15th of November. And I did not choose it for a purpose.

I was just reminded this morning by my wife that what a coincidence. It's like 11 and 15 altogether. I think it could not be a very good sermon to remember because it's the last sermon, at least for this year at St. Mark's.

I'll be coming. I'm still coming next year because I'll be living this Friday. Yeah, there are a couple of things that I would like to highlight before we go straight into this passage in front of us, which I think are very important for us to understand what the psalmist or what the writer or the writers of this Psalm 115 are trying to communicate to us this morning.

A couple of things. First, I would like you to know that Psalm 115 is the first polemic song in the Old Sarta. By polemic, I mean it's a strong attack on idols and idol worship.

If you read Psalm 196, you'll realize that there's only a mention of idols there, but a very serious and strong attack on idols and idol worship for the first time is found in this Psalm 115.

[1 : 25] We have a number of attack on idols and idol worship in Isaiah, but in the Sarta, Psalm 115 is the first one. The other thing I would like you to know about the Psalm 115 is that Psalm 115 belongs to a collection of songs known as songs of praise or praise Yahweh songs.

And this collection is also known as Alel Egypt. These songs, beginning from 113 up to 118, this collection was used for worship and praise the Lord during the time of Passover.

Actually, during the time of all those main festivals of the Jewish calendar, but particularly the Passover time. So it is very likely that our Lord Jesus Christ and his disciples, they actually sung this very song, Psalm 115, or if not this one, at least one of this collection that we have from 113 up to 118.

It is one of the songs of praise, praising Yahweh. And another thing that I want you to also notice on Psalm 115 is that we don't really know who is the writer of this song and who are the writers.

We are not very much sure, but there are a couple of probabilities. There are a couple of possibilities. And I think it is important to actually try to speculate. And that speculation, I think, will help us to understand the message that Psalm 115 is trying to communicate.

[3 : 09] Some commentators or some scholars think that it could be written by Moses just after Exodus, just after leaving Egypt, after going through hard time and persecution and difficult time in Egypt, and God delivered the people of Israel out of Egypt and crossing the Red Sea right in the wilderness.

Probably it could be written by Moses just to thank God for what God has done for his people. And others argue that probably it could be written by David in Jerusalem right at the beginning of his reign when he was just established as a king.

And after God has given him victory over his own enemies and now he is now ruling as the king of God's people. And then he came up with Psalm 115 in order to give glory back to the Lord.

We are not very much sure who are the writers of the song. But some go further and think probably it was written by King Ezekiah in Jerusalem when the Assyrians came right at the door of Jerusalem trying to attack and trying to persecute and kill the people of God.

But God came and intervened and rescued the people of God. And right after that victory, probably Ezekiah, the king of God, of Judah, came up with the song to praise the Lord and give back the glory to Yahweh.

[4 : 33] And others will say no. Probably this song was written by the three men we know in Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And after all the hard times and difficulties they went through in Babylon and after they were thrown into the furnace of fire and the Lord came up and

delivered them.

And it is in light of those events probably they came up with this song of praise to praise the Lord and give back the glory to Yahweh. And it is also probably that it could be written by Esther and Mordecai.

Remember what God did in Bethsa. God preserved his people. All the people of God who were spread out in 127 provinces of Babylon, they were all saved and preserved by the Lord and they never died.

Whatever attacks, whatever evil things that were planned by the enemies, God came up and saved his people. And that was through Esther and Mordecai. Probably these are the ones who came up with the song to praise the Lord and give him glory.

We are not quite sure. But I think even though we are speculating, we are not really sure who are the writers and who is the writer of Psalm 115. I think the writer could be someone who lived after exile, after the Babylonian exile.

[5 : 57] Why am I saying this? I'm saying this for two reasons. First, it's because this song, remember it is the first polemic, it's the first song that seriously attacked idols and idol worship.

It is in Babylon where the Israelites had the first witness of idols for the first time. I think we know also that they also had the first witness of idols in Egypt.

But what makes me believe that it was after Babylonian captivity, if you look at verse 11, the leadership of Israel after exile, the leadership was not in the hands of a king, but it was in the hands of the priests.

And there's a mention of the house of Aaron in verse 9 and 10 there. And there's no mention of the house of kings or the kingship there.

So this is the reason and indication that it could be probably written during the time after exile, because at that particular time, the leadership of the people of God was no longer in the hands of a king, but in the hands of a priest.

[7 : 03] And this time they are talking about the house of Aaron. It's quite important to know this, because they will give us light as we understand this passage together.

Another interesting thing about this song, 1-1-15, is a liturgical song. It was sung in turn by the congregation together with the priests.

The priests could sing, and also the congregation could come up also by responding. In turn, it has got about six stanzas, if you can notice.

Look at verse 1, for instance. It's the stanza on its own. It begins by the whole congregation coming up together and giving exclusive glory to Yahweh.

That's the first stanza. And in the second stanza, starting from verse 2 up to verse 8, the congregation again comes together and trying to see the futility and worthlessness of idols and idol worship.

[8 : 08] There from 2 up to 8. The third stanza, from 9 to 11, is actually sung by the priest. It's a call to trust in Yahweh alone, which is followed by the fourth stanza in verse 12 and 13, which is a confession of trust.

The whole congregation comes up responding to a call to trust by making a confession in trusting in Yahweh. And the fifth stanza, from verse 14 and 15, is a benediction.

It's a priestly blessing. The priest comes up and blesses the people of God by telling them to increase them and their children and that the Lord will bless them.

And at the end, the last one is verse 16 up to 18. We see the congregation comes up again by making a confession of trust in the Lord. So we have about six stanzas, but this morning I'll be focusing on the first three stanzas, starting from verse 1 up to verse 11.

And the theme that I'd like us to talk about this morning is about Yahweh alone is to be trusted, Yahweh alone is to be glorified. And I will use three imperatives, three obligations that I will draw from these three stanzas.

[9 : 33] The first obligation or the first imperative that this psalm is trying to call us to do is to render the glory to Yahweh alone. Have a look in verse 1.

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

The congregation begins by giving Yahweh exclusive glory and making a strong renunciation of all claim to honor, of all merit for what, for everything that had ever been done or things that might be done for the preservation of the people of God or even for the elevation of Israel.

Nothing that had ever been done for the people of God Israel has merited. Israel did not deserve anything of all those generous acts God has done in history for them.

For instance, the formation of Israel as the people of God through Abraham. They did not merit to become a people of God. God used Abraham and through Abraham and God made a nation and he called them and made them his people.

For instance, the preservation of the people of God through Joseph in Egypt. Everything that the Lord has done has nothing to do with the people of God.

[11 : 01] There was nothing worthy in themselves that prompted God to come up with all those deeds and marvelous works of deliverance. Even the deliverance out of Egypt.

Everything that the Lord has done in history for Israel either to elevate them either to glorify them to put them above all the nations by showing their love. Nothing has been done because of the worthiness of the people of Israel but everything has been done because of God's love and God's faithfulness.

This is the reason why the congregation begins by renouncing all merits of glory by renouncing or claim to honor by saying we do not deserve to get the glory we do not deserve to get even the praise for everything that we have gone through for every achievement.

If we are the people of God today it is because of God's and God's glory. If we've been preserved through a lot of trials and suffering it's not because we are better than other nations but it is because Yahweh is great and it's because of his glory alone.

So it is a strong renunciation this is the reason why it has been repeated twice as you can see in Psalm 115 not to us and for the second time not to us it's a strong renunciation we do not want to get the glory the glory should go back to Yahweh and Yahweh alone.

[12 : 31] Everything that God has done whether to preserve Israel whether to elevate Israel whether to glorify or to make them his people everything has been done because of the name of Yahweh.

You can notice that the writers of the song they come up with two basic reasons why God has done what he has done in history for his people it is not for the worthiness of the people of God in themselves but it is because first of all of the love of God it is because of his own love and when we talk of the love of God we mean that commitment of God that unfailing and unconditional commitment of God to always seek the highest God of others God has that commitment to the people it is because of that love God has done whatever he has done in history to preserve or to elevate the people of God to deliver them out of Egypt to make them his people it is because God is God of love his love is unfailing his love is unconditional none of the people of God none of the people among the people of Israel deserved to be loved it is because of this unconditional love that God has done and for this reason the congregation comes up together and say it is because of your love it is because of that commitment you have that unfailing commitment that unconditional commitment that we have been able to be called by your name not only that but it is also because of the faithfulness of God

God is faithful we are not none of us is really faithful the way God is by faithfulness I mean that the actions and the attitudes of God they are very consistent with his character many times we are not sometimes we portray attitudes and actions that are not consistent with our character but God is not like that his character is consistent with his actions and his attitudes God is faithful but faithfulness does not just mean that consistency faithfulness of God means also that God keeps his promises God is a keeper of covenant it is because of God being faithful to his covenant that he has done whatever he has done for his people I did not mean God being love God of love and God of faithfulness nothing could have happened for the people of Israel so the basis of all what Israel was in the plan of God is the love of God on one hand and the faithfulness of God that's why God is to be given glory God is to be glorified if you read if you come with me in Ephesians chapter 2 verse 8 and 9 you hear the words of Apostle Paul when he's celebrating and talking about the great salvation that we have in the Lord Jesus and the forgiveness of sins hear what he says for it is by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not from yourselves it is the gift of God not by works so that no one can boast the great salvation that we enjoy the fact that you and me are part of God's family has nothing to do with anything worthy in yourself it has to do with God's love because the love of God prompts him to love the unworthy we are the unworthy people you don't have to make yourself worthy to win God's love the love of God comes to us as unworthy as we are and for that very reason we have no claim to honor we have no claim to merit we have to bring back

the glory to Jesus and what he has done on the cross when Paul is talking about ministry and the talents and the gifting that people have listen to what he says in 1 Corinthians chapter 4 verse 7 for who makes you different from anyone else what do you have that you did not receive and if you did receive it why do you boast as though you did not this shows clearly that whatever we have even the gift we have the talent the Lord has given us the material things that we enjoy life that we enjoy nothing comes to you because of anything good that is in you it is because of God's love which is his commitment that is unfailing and conditional to us and it is because

God is a keeper of his promise and he does it for the sake of his own name remember what God said in Exodus I am going to come back and deliver my people because of my name because of this because of the name of God he is doing it for the sake of his own name not because of anything good that God has found in us we are not capable we are not able to merit the love of God because we are desperate and we are sinners and we are lost without God so for that very reason the glory must be returned to God we should never never dare to get the glory back to ourselves because it belongs to God alone and for that reason twice the psalmist repeats no to us no to us Yahweh but to your name be the glory because of your love and your faithfulness this is the first imperative this is the first obligation that we get right from right at the beginning of the psalmist of this song 115 is we should render the glory back to Yahweh alone and for those two reasons because of his love and because of his faithfulness and the second obligation that we get from the psalmist it is from verse 2 up to verse 18 that we should not rely do not rely rely not on your own idols you don't have to rely upon your own idols look at verse 2 why do the nations say where is their God at this stage things have come at a certain state where the presence of God the providence of God even is being is being questioned by the nations this is the reason why [18:56] Kelvin says even if we don't know the writers and the place of writing of this song 115 but we are very much sure that it was written the time when the people of God were going through a tough time they were going through great trials to the point where the presence of God was being doubted and questioned by the nations as you hear verse 2 there why do the nations say where is their God this is a question of mockery it's a question of trying to doubt the presence of God even is providence whenever when they look at what is happening the trials and difficult times the people of God are going the vain victory of the enemies over the people of God they stand and question the presence the providence even the power of God even his existence where is your God if your God is there why are you going through what you are going at this particular time why are you in exile or why have you been conquered so this is a time when God alone can come and vindicate his name this is a rude question coming from the pagan nations where is your

God and one of the reasons why they are trying to ask this question where is your God is because pagan nations they've got gods that can see with their own eyes and the God of Israel is invisible cannot be seen where is your God it's not only that reason and the other reason is because it seems like your God is powerless if he was powerful why are you going through this situation why are you going through this kind of trials gods alone is to be trusted and not the nations their gods in verse 2 there this question of asking where is your God in other words it's like the nations are trying to promote idol worship they are trying to promote their own gods they are trying to show how much powerful their gods are and the God of Israel is not and yet if you read very well Psalm 115 you will understand that these gods of the nations are not to be relied on and let me give you the two reasons why they are not to be trusted they are not to be relied upon the gods of the nations the idols are not worthy of our trust they are not worthy of our glory they are not to be trusted the first reason is because

Yahweh alone is sovereign hear the answer that comes from verse 3 our God is in heaven though God is invisible is in heaven the God of Israel is in heaven where the gods of the nations are the god of heaven is in heaven where is ruling all the nations of the world is in heaven where is ruling the earthly powers even the heavenly powers is in heaven in control and in charge of everything that is going on.

He's in heaven where the nations and the people of the world will never reach and go and manipulate him. The God of the nations can be manipulated, but our God is so high and is in heaven and is in control. Nobody can control him. Nobody can manipulate him.

Nobody can calm even our malice. He's in heaven and he's laughing. He's laughing because the nations think they've conquered the people of God. When you look at what is happening in the world, you might think that something has gone beyond God's control.

[22 : 36] You might think that where is God? The perspective of Christians is to respond by saying our God is in heaven and he's in heaven where nobody can reach and control him.

He's in heaven where he's controlling everything. Everything is under control. God is not obligated to explain to us what he's doing. God is not obligated to give us all the details why he's allowing certain situations and certain trials to happen in the world.

All we know is in heaven and he's doing what pleases to him. There is nothing that has ever happened to the people of God that has happened beyond God's control. Everything is in control. I don't know to whom I'm speaking this morning. You might be going through some trials, some difficulties, some situations that are very tough to the point where people around you may question where is your God?

If you are really a Christian, why are you going through this tough situation? Remember your God is in heaven and he's doing whatever pleases. Whatever happens in your life, in my life, is under God's permission.

[23 : 43] And in his wisdom, there is nothing that God makes as a mistake. God is a wise God. In wisdom, he knows everything. He understands everything. And he knows how to perfectly apply that knowledge to life.

There is no mistake in everything that God does. Because he's in heaven, whatever he allows, whether good and bad, there is too much wisdom. And we cannot comprehend his wisdom. What we can respond to his wisdom is to trust him, to know that he's in control, he's in heaven. What is happening in Paris? What is happening in the world today? Everything. Everything. The people of God, when they pray, it appears as if our prayers are not answered. It appears as if God is not powerful. But we know from Psalm 115 that he is in heaven, where nobody can reach. No power, no president of the world, no king of the world will go and manipulate our God.

He's in heaven and he's ruling. It's from there. Everybody should understand that the Lord is in charge. And we don't have to panic. We have to trust the Lord and not the gods of the nation.

[24 : 52] This is the first reason why the gods of the nations are not to be trusted. Because our God is the one who is in heaven and is doing whatever pleases him.

There is nothing that happens to you or to me or to the church or to the people of God that is beyond God's control and beyond knowledge. He does everything in his wisdom. We complain. It's because we fail to understand the wisdom of God. We do complain and we think things have gone out of control. It's because we are human and we think we can control things. The Lord is moving everything perfectly, smoothly in his wisdom. All we must do as a people of God is to trust in the wisdom of the one who is in heaven and the one who is controlling the world. And by doing everything that pleases to him, I cannot go to God and tell him what to do. You remember right at the end of the book of Job, after Job came up with a lot of questions, God has been quiet from the beginning of the book up to the end.

[25 : 53] There at the end, in chapter 38, God comes up. Job challenged God by many questions, thinking that he was wise enough to correct the ways of God.

And God comes up in chapter 38 there with a list of questions that Job could not answer. God told Job, sit down. You will be my lecturer.

I will be your students. If you think you are wise, I will ask you questions and you will answer me. All the questions that God came up with and asked Job, he could not answer everyone.

The point was, I am wise and you are not. You must trust what I am doing. Everything that God does, he does in wisdom. Why? Because he is a sovereign God.

He is in heaven. He is doing everything that pleases to him. If it pleases for God to allow certain trials and calamities in our lives, he knows what he is doing.

[26 : 50] Everything is for the good of the church and the good of his people. So we don't have to panic. Everything is under control. We know even if we don't see, we've seen a lot of good things in our lives that show that God is there, is present in our lives, and he actually came in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are very much sure that the Lord is there and has done what he has done in history. We must trust the Lord for that. This is the reason, one of the reasons why the nations, the gods of the nations are not to be trusted.

The second reason, which I think is the most important one, that we should not rely upon our own idols, is what idols do to us.

There is a very big danger in idols and idol worship. Look at verse 8. Those who make them will be like them, and so all who trust in them.

The danger in idols and idol worship is not in idols themselves, but is in us who are trying to rely in our idols.

[28 : 01] What do they do to us? Those who make them will be like them. The danger is that idols, they destroy us.

They degrade us. They lower us. They make us to be like them. And it is that likeness that will destroy us.

The likeness of idol worship is like cancer that goes slowly in our lives and destroys us. We may not realize today, but because we trust in our own idols, we become, eventually we become like them. It is a judgment that God does. If you misplace your trust, instead of relying upon Yahweh, and you rely in your own idols, or the idols that you have made up yourself, God will judge you by making you looking like the idols.

How are the idols, by the way? They are lifeless. They are useless. They are helpless. They cannot help. Whatever they have as organs of sense, they are mere decoration, just for sure.

[29 : 15] They've got eyes, they cannot see. They've got mouth, they cannot speak. There is nothing they can do. Everything is just for sure. And for decoration, they are helpless.

They are useless. And if you want to become like that, it's when you trust in idols, you will become, eventually, lifeless, without no real life, because real life is in the Lord Jesus Christ.

You'll become blind. Idol worship makes people blind. It is very difficult to convince people who are blind, apart from the work of the Holy Spirit, because they become like their idols.

So that's the danger. It's not just a naughty thing to do when you go and worship your idols. You realize by the end of the day that you will be destroyed. You will be degrade.

You will be lowered down. You will be like the idols. You will be blind. You will be deaf. You won't get anything from the Lord. You become deaf because you resemble the idols you worship.

[30 : 15] Someone may say here that, no, I don't have an idol. An idol is a pagan issue. Or maybe an idol is just an Old Testament issue. But I'm here to tell you this morning that an idol is a human problem.

Idol is a human problem. It's not just an Old Testament issue. It's not just a pagan issue. It's not just a Jewish problem. It is an issue of human being. Where do you trust?

Where do you put your trust? What is it that you rely on? For your security? For your peace? If you put your trust in anything other than Yahweh, that is your idol.

And it will destroy you. We have a lot of categories of idol worship. You may not have something made up of wood or silver or anything in your house to bow down.

But anything that robs the devotion that you are supposed to give to Yahweh, it is an idol. It may be social media. It could be a relationship that absorbs your time and your devotion that you are supposed to give to God.

[31 : 30] It could be sports that takes away your time for prayer and reading the Bible and give yourself to God. What is it that takes away your devotion to God?

That is your idol. The more you trust in it, eventually it will destroy it. It's like you may not realize today, it will actually come and destroy you. So we have that.

And in the New Testament, we are taught that even greed, it is another form of idol worship. A greedy person is the person who is not satisfied with what the Lord has given him.

The more you get, the more you want. You want to get more of something. And you don't mind about relationship. Whoever comes because you are too greedy for something, whether it's power, whether it's fame, whether it's money, whether it's material things, you don't mind about relationships anymore.

You can crush whoever comes on your way simply because you want to get more of a particular thing that you worship and trust. Because of that, you are falling into idol worship and that idol worship will eventually destroy you.

[32 : 44] So this is the danger. This is the reason why we are not supposed to trust in idol worship because they destroy us, because they make us useless and helpless and we become like them, dumb and blind.

We cannot see, we cannot see the right passage, we cannot hear the true word of God. For this reason, we must run away from it because idolatry is one of the serious sins in the Old Testament and the New Testament, in the Bible, in the Old Bible that we must reject and run away from.

These are the two reasons why idols are not to be trusted. Why? Number one, because Yahweh alone is sovereign and is ruling and second is because idol worship destroys us.

It degrades us. It makes us to be useless and we are nothing at the end of the day. And the third imperative that we can get from Psalm 115 is that we should rely on Yahweh alone.

Have a look on verse 9. O house of Israel, trust in the Lord. He is their help and shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the Lord.

[33 : 57] He is their help and shield. You who fear him, trust in the Lord. He is their help and shield. Have you noticed that three times the writer or the writers of Psalm, this Psalm 115, trying to invite, making a call to trust in Yahweh, three times.

When God says something once, we should listen carefully because he's God. When he says something twice, we should pay more attention to it.

What about when God repeats something? Three times, the same thing. In that case, we should drop everything else we are doing. Give our full attention to study, ponder, memorize, meditate, and joyfully obey what God has told us to do.

And in this case, God tells us three times that we must trust in him. We must trust in Yahweh. So what we must do is just to do that.

We must rely on him rather than in our own idols that we've made up. We tend to think that we may have peace and security in things that we've created around us rather than in Yahweh.

[35 : 09] In material things and other stuff, we must trust in Yahweh and Yahweh alone. And here they give us two reasons again why Yahweh alone is to be trusted. The first reason is because Yahweh is our help.

The gods of the nations are helpless, but Yahweh is our help. Yahweh is able to help you. He's our help. In any situation, if you look back in your life and history, you have a number of occasions where you can stand up and say, I did not have been Yahweh.

I did not have been Jesus. I don't know where I would have been. Yahweh is our help. For that reason, he must be trusted. And the second reason that we are given is because Yahweh is our shield.

And the word shield has to do with protection in terms of troubles and difficulties. Yahweh is with you. even when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, he's not outside of the valley. He's there with you in the same valley of the shadow of death. He's there to protect you. He protects us. He's always with us. You remember one of the last promises of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[36 : 13] He said, go into the nation and preach the gospel. And he gave us the promise, I will be with you always. The Lord is with us. He's with you even in your difficult times. Even when you fail to understand what you are going through, remember, he's in heaven and he's doing everything that it pleases to him.

Whatever he allows in your life, there is too much wisdom in it. He knows what he's doing in the world. There's nothing that is going beyond Yahweh. Therefore, brothers and sisters, this morning, I'm telling you, render the glory to Yahweh our Lord.

Rely not on your own idols, but you must rely on Yahweh alone. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you that we are able