

“A Psalm of Worship”
Psalm 115:1-8, 16-18
August 20, 2023 - BMZ

Pre-Introduction: Last week we walked through Psalm 1 and talked about this as being a solid foundation for not only the Psalms, but as a part of the foundation for our life. A good challenge for the rest of summer may be to read a Psalm a day, or part of a Psalm a day, and as we read through the Psalms — which portray the ups and downs of this life, and with our relationship with God — on our own, we must remember the foundation of Psalm 1. **Are we sticking close to God? Close to our source of life?**

Wherever we might find ourselves ... in whatever kind of situation ... we need to build off this foundation. This is what will keep us grounded when life around us is pulling us in all different directions.

Introduction: Which leads us to this week’s topic — worship. You might say that all of the psalms are worship in a way, but there are some specifically about the worship of God.

Pastor Tim Keller says this about the Psalms and worship,

The psalms also help us see God — God not as we wish or hope him to be but as he actually reveals himself. The descriptions of God in the Psalter are rich beyond human invention. He is more holy, more wise, more fearsome, more tender and loving than we would ever imagine him to be. The psalms fire our imagination into new realms yet guide them toward the god who actually exists. This brings a reality to our prayer lives that nothing else can.

Commented [1]:

Transition: Within this book we have descriptions of who God is. As we worship God, this is very important to remember! It’s a great temptation to make God in the image who we want God to be and worship that instead of the real God. This is when frustration or confusion can set in because we may be worshiping a god of our own making instead of the God of creation ... the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ... God the Father who sent His only Begotten Son, Jesus ... the God who loves us unconditionally.

Early in Psalm 115, one of the great questions about God is asked. This is a question that we need to know and understand if we're going to properly worship God ...

BIBLE

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

Commented [2]:

The writer begins by placing proper focus and perspective on God. It is God who deserves honor and glory because of his love and his faithfulness. When we remain close to God and continue to exercise our faith in God, we come to know and experience God's love and faithfulness. We become the tree by the stream from Psalm 1 ... we grow into who God created us to be ... and we celebrate God for what God has done.

Now for the question ...

2 *Why do the nations say, "Where is their God?"*

Commented [3]:

These are other nations looking at Israel and asking this question. They can't see God ... yet they're able to see their own gods ... the ones that they've made.

Skipping verse 3 for a minute ... the psalmist describes these other gods in verses 4-8 ...

4 *But their idols are silver and gold, made by human hands. 5 They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see. 6 They have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but cannot smell. 7 They have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but cannot walk, nor can they utter a sound with their throats. 8 Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them.*

Commented [4]:

Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them. These people asking the Israelites, "Where is their God?", are people who've made up their own gods ... and thus can't be any better than the creator. Sure you can see them ... but what good does it do if they aren't living gods.

Let's circle back to verse 3 now ...

2 *Why do the nations say, "Where is their God?"* **3** *Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.*

Commented [5]:

We may not be able to physically see God, but this doesn't mean that God is not active in this world ... and in our lives.

Transition: Where is God? It's a question that has been asked throughout the ages. Anytime there is a great tragedy people will ask, "Where is God?" Where is God in times of famine? Where is God in times of war? Where is God in when earthquakes and tsunamis kill hundreds and thousands of people? Where is God during the wildfires raging across the land?

As David writes this psalm, it seems that Israel had endured some difficult times. Israel had been a powerful, glorious nation ... but it has hit a rough patch. The once powerful Hebrew God seems nowhere to be found. So now their enemies were taunting them for their hope in God.

If you profess to be a follower of Christ and you find yourself in troublesome times, it is almost a guarantee that you will encounter someone— perhaps a friend, family member or co-worker who will ask the question, "Where is your God"? Those who do not have a personal relationship with Jesus cannot comprehend the peace that we possess even in times of great difficulty.

Folks here is the living God that we worship ...

I. HE'S IN THE EYE OF THE STORM - Mark 4:37-41

37 *A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. **38** Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"*

39 *He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.*

40 *He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"*

41 *They were terrified and asked each other, Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"*

Commented [6]:

In these verses Jesus and His disciples were in a ship. A great storm arose, the wind blew, the waves crashed and the ship began to fill with water. The disciples were greatly afraid. They went to Jesus and woke Him up, and verse 39 says, "*He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, Quiet! Be still!*" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm."

Those men learned a lesson that we need to learn today. Jesus is with us during the storm. When He sees fit, Jesus has the power to calm the storm. Maybe you are in the midst of a great storm today. Perhaps the doctor has given you some bad news. Maybe you have a marriage that seems to be headed for divorce. Things at work aren't going good. Even worse, some of you don't even have job at the moment. Maybe you are dealing with a rebellious child. There are bills that you can't pay. Your life is filled with uncertainty.

But with all that is wrong in your life, you have the proper perspective. You know that no matter what this world throws your way that you are child of God. You know that you belong to Jesus. And though the winds are blowing and the waves are crashing in, you are focused on the Lord. You know that your hope and trust is in Him. You know that there is a reason for the storm. You know that you have a refuge in the storm.

When asked, "Where is your God?", those who have a relationship with Him will be able to respond. *He's here and worthy to be praised ... He's in the eye of the storm!*

Our God ... our living and active God is also ...

II. ... IN THE HEART OF THE FIRE — Daniel 3:24-26

24 *Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?" They replied, Certainly, Your Majesty."*

25 *He said, Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods."*

26 *Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!*
So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire ...

Commented [7]:

What precedes these verses, if you're unfamiliar with this story is that King Nebuchadnezzar erected an idol of gold and commanded all of the people to bow down and worship it. There were 3 Hebrew men who were devoted to the Lord and refused to bow. They were given the opportunity to compromise but they would not. So the King commanded that the furnace be heated 7 times hotter than ever before. He then commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be bound and cast into the fire. After this, Nebuchadnezzar looked in the furnace and was amazed at what he saw. And this is the passage I just read picks up.

Throughout my life I've seen the Christian faith come to be challenged more and more. As Christians, we are finding ourselves in more situations where we have to take stands that are unpopular. If we live by the Bible and are obedient to God's Word we are going to have to say no to the things of this world. When we do this we may be called insensitive, politically incorrect, bigots or religious zealots. As a result we may face difficulties from time to time. And when this happens there will be some who ask, "Where is Your God?" If and when this takes place we can tell them, "He's In The Heart Of The Fire!"

I remember 5 years ago or so there were 3 detained UMC missionaries from the Philippines earlier. This is a country where Christianity is spreading ... where the UMC is growing. It's not as if this country, this government, hasn't seen or heard Christians before. Yet, here they are suffering for a faith in which they believe.

When the time comes and you take a stand for Jesus and you are persecuted for your faith ... when you face fiery trials and the people of this world ask you, "Where Is Your God?", *you can tell them He's here and worthy to be praised ... He's in the heart of the fire.*

God is also ...

III. ... IN THE DEEPEST OF VALLEYS - Psalms 23:4

4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Commented [8]:

David speaks of the fact that the Lord is our Shepherd ... and we are His sheep. A shepherd often has to lead his sheep through some frightening and dangerous places. David realized that even when traveling through the valley of the shadow of death he had no reason to fear. He trusted the Shepherd to lead him and protect him.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd and we are His sheep. This Good Shepherd loves His sheep enough that He gave His life for them. Though we face dark times and difficult circumstances He is in control. Because of this we can pass through the valleys of this life with assurance and peace!

Perhaps the most difficult valley that we will walk through in this life is losing a loved one. Yes we are Christians and we "do not sorrow as those with no hope". But it is hard to say goodbye to those that we love. We still hurt, we still mourn and grieve over the loss. The world looks at us as we cling to the hope we have in Jesus to get us through these valleys and they are quick to say "Where Is Your God?" *When they do, we can tell them He's here and worthy to be praised ... He's in the deepest of valley!*

Where Is Our God? He's in the eye of the storm ... the heart of the fire ... and in the deepest of valleys!

Commented [9]:

Conclusion:

This is why God is worthy to be praised ... this is why God is to be worshipped. We've never been promised an easy life as Christians, but God's continued presence with us during our lives. This is why the psalmist can end Psalm 115 with,

16 The highest heavens belong to the Lord, but the earth he has given to mankind. 17 It is not the dead who praise the Lord, those who go down to the place of silence; 18 it is we who extol the Lord, both now and forevermore. Praise the Lord.

Commented [10]:

In English the version of the Hebrew phrase, "Praise the Lord," looks like this ...

Hallelu Yah

Our God is not only in Heaven, but active in our lives through all of the ups and downs He's in the eye of the storm, the heart of the fire, and in the deepest valleys ... by our side. Hallelujah, indeed!

Commented [11]:

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