

## PSALLO

### Psalm 115:1–9

The metrical translation you have before you is the Scottish Metrical version (1650), coupled with a new tune. This is a very honest translation of the Hebrew text here in Psalm 115, and presents the inspired text of the Psalmist (who is anonymous) with clarity, divine exclusivity, and perhaps, with a hint of derision aimed at the “idols of the nations,” as we shall see.

Commentators are divided as to when in Israel’s history this Psalm was written, as Rev. W. S. Plumer summarizes in his work on the Psalter:

Both the date and authorship of this Psalm are uncertain. It has been ascribed to Moses at the Red sea, to David at the beginning of his reign, to Mordecai and Esther, to Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, and to Hezekiah. The discussions on this subject have failed to produce conviction in the mind of others than their authors. This ode suits many times in the history of Israel. The prevailing impression is that it was composed during a time of great trial. Calvin: “It is obvious that this Psalm was penned when the church was deeply afflicted;” Tholuck: “A Psalm of prayer and praise, composed in a time of Pagan oppression;” Pool: “The occasion of this Psalm was to manifest some eminent danger or distress of the people of Israel from some idolatrous nations.” Yet it is not a despondent song. Indeed it expresses strong confidence in God. This is so true that Clarke speaks of it as “a triumphal song, in which the victory gained is entirely ascribed to Jehovah.” Scott, who thinks it was perhaps written during Sennacherib’s invasion, dates it B. C. 710; Clarke, B. C. 535.<sup>1</sup>

This understanding, that the Psalm was written during a time of distress or persecution, seems to flow from verse two, where the enemies of God derisively wonder aloud where the God of Israel has gone. There have been many times in Israel’s history when such mistaken confidence and disbelief in the true God was the undoing of her enemies.<sup>2</sup> This Psalm is given to the people of God who might hear such a taunt in their own ears, uttered by God’s and their enemies, that it would prove an encouragement to them as they sing it, as is often the case even in our own day.

The Psalms begins with the heart-cry of every believer in the Lord—“Not unto us, O LORD, but to thy Name give glory.” There are several applications we ought to make from this opening statement. The first is that the Lord’s own vindication of His Name is indeed for the good of His people. Assumed in this celebration of the Name of God is that the Lord will vindicate His Name in His covenant promises to His people. This is assured to us in the next phrase, where we read that it is for the Lord’s mercy and truth’s sake. The Hebrew is emphatic, repeating the preposition before each substantive noun, “for thy truth, and for thy mercy’s sake.” Literally, the Hebrew preposition *ל* in this instance should be understood as *on account of*, or as the Scottish Metrical Version has it, *for the sake of*. As for the nouns themselves, they are said to belong to God Himself, *His* mercy, and *His* truth. The word translated mercy is here *חַסְדִּים* meaning *covenant fidelity*, or *faithfulness*. This word introduces the idea of God’s fidelity to His Name and promises, along with the word translated as truth, *אֱמֻנָה* (from which we get our English, *Amen*), that God speaks the truth, knows the truth, is “truth itself,”<sup>3</sup> and so is utterly trustworthy in all His promises and Word. So we learn that when the Lord glorifies His own Name in showing Himself faithful to His promises, this is also for the blessing and salvation of His people, with whom He has covenanted in Christ.<sup>4</sup>

The second application is the palpable humility in such an expression. The worshipper, singing this Psalm, confesses that it is his desire for the Lord to be glorified, rather than himself. There are many passages of Scripture which bear this principle out, and in an age of “selfies” and other narcissistic social media, this is a refreshing confession in the mouth of the Psalmist. In an age of the intentional and habitual seeking of earthly recognition, and in such seeking, attempting gathering as much honor and accolade from others as possible, this Biblical principle is welcome in the mouth of the worshipper of the Great and Glorious God. While self-promotion seems the standard fare of politics, business, romance, fitness, and many other pursuits, sadly, even religious or spiritual pursuits, this Psalm calls us to a recognition of the glory which belongs to the only one who is worthy, before Whom we must learn to bow, and tends to the promotion of reverence, humility, and awe.

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1. William S. Plumer, *Studies in the Book of Psalms: Being a Critical and Expository Commentary, with Doctrinal and Practical Remarks on the Entire Psalter* (Philadelphia; Edinburgh: J. B. Lippincott Company; A & C Black, 1872), p. 994.

2. See Psalm 42:3, 10; 79:10; 2 Kings 19:10–19; Micah 7:10; Malachi 2:17.

3. See Westminster confession of Faith, 1.4.

4. See Westminster Larger Catechism, Q. 31.

to historical narrative, and whether the same hermeneutical principles apply to other parts of Scripture, could move into second- or first-rank doctrinal divergences.<sup>58</sup>

#### FAITHFULNESS AND PATIENCE

In the epistle to the Romans, the inspired apostle Paul gives a statement of core Christian confession for salvation: “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom. 10:9). Yet, the testimony of Scripture to which a Christian will and must be committed to is certainly far wider and greater than this. Even where we say that one *can* be a Christian with minimal, core belief, this does not negate saying that a Christian *must* hold to a much larger sphere of belief, as he or she comes to read, hear, and learn more of the Scriptures. Even Paul’s basic statement in Romans 10:9, while in one way simple, is at the same time profoundly rich and deep theologically in the truth it states—and it is inseparably connected to the galaxy of truth revealed in the whole of the Scriptures. Christians are whole-Bible people: we are to believe all that God has revealed in His Word (2 Pet. 1:21). At the same time, we are sinful, weak, and fallible in this present world, and we need the teaching of the Word and Spirit to come to clearer and more full understanding of and commitment to the Bible. The Westminster Confession of Faith helpfully reminds Christians that “particular churches are more or less pure ... [and] the purest churches under heaven are subject to both mixture and error.”<sup>59</sup>

This article has argued that there are clear lines in creation understanding where biblical doctrine may be so violated that ecclesial unity is an impossibility; at the same time there are areas where errors and diverging understanding do not rise to this level. We must exercise wise patience, lovingly praying and working together for a greater clarity and unity in biblical understanding, while remaining watchful and active against the erosive reality and implications of error. We can do so with confident dependence on the God who has given us His Word, knowing He preserves His church, and delights to lead His children “into all truth” (John 16:13). ■

#### *Psallo: Psalm 115:1–9. Continued from Page 303.*

Hear the inspired Word of the Lord in a few other selected passages of Holy Scripture, pertaining to this temptation:

“It is not good to eat much honey: so for men to search their own glory is not glory.” “Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips.” “For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.” “Though while he lived he blessed his soul: and men will praise thee, when thou doest well to thyself.”<sup>5</sup>

These and many other Scriptures point us away from the spirit of the age and remind us that the standard of goodness, holiness, truth, justice, etc., is that which God Himself is and does—and that all [others] have sinned and fall short of *His glory*.<sup>6</sup> When we call upon the Lord to vindicate His Name, ask Him to advance His cause among us, as an application of these requests we call upon Him to humble us and to give repentance from our natural pride and self-advancement. Our Lord Jesus will speak of this to His opponents, those who doubted of His Messiahship. He tells them, “I am come in my Father’s name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive. How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that *cometh* from God only?”<sup>7</sup> Here our Lord makes clear the principle that if we honor ourselves and seek to receive honor from men, as the Scribes the Pharisees, we impoverish ourselves of the honor that comes from God only. He will promote this thought in the Sermon on the Mount, speaking of alms-giving, prayer, and fasting in such a way so as to be seen of men, seeking our own glory. His sentence upon that procedure is “they have their reward.”<sup>8</sup> That is, they sought the recognition of others, and that is all they received, including all its worthlessness. Immediately following that instruction, He declares, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth,” including the treasure of the esteem of men.<sup>9</sup> Our day presents a tremendous opportunity, and with it great temptation, to “come in our own name,” “seek honor from men,” or to “be seen of men.” This Psalm is an inoculation against this spirit of our age, laying our honor in the dust, and seeking rather the glory of God, reminding us that this kind of earthly honor accompanies those who, as it is written in Psalm 49, are laid like sheep in the grave.<sup>10</sup>

5. Proverbs 25:27. Proverbs 27:2. 2 Corinthians 10:18. Psalm 49:18.

6. Romans 3:23.

7. John 5:43–44.

8. Matthew 6:1–18.

9. Matthew 6:19.

10. The entire Psalm is of great use in this regard, but especially when the Psalmist (as descendant of the Levite Korah who sought a glory and honor outside of his place) relates that man who is had in such earthly honor is as the beast which perishes. See Psalm 49:18–20.

58. VanDoodewaard, “Hermeneutics and the Quest for the Historical Adam” in *The Quest for the Historical Adam*, pp. 277–80.

59. Westminster Confession of Faith, 25.4–5.

Another application from the opening verses of this inspired Hymn is that no matter what the taunts of our enemies, we have a clear answer from the mouth of the Lord: “But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.”<sup>11</sup> Our lives are not lived or interpreted according to our temporal circumstances, for we walk by faith, and not by sight. Earlier we referenced 2 Kings 19:10–19, and the history of the siege of Jerusalem by the forces of Assyria, led by Rabshakeh.<sup>12</sup> All appearances were that Jerusalem was about to fall as Samaria had fallen in the north. As a part of the prayer for deliverance that King Hezekiah offered to the Lord in those days, he also prayed,

Of a truth, LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations, and their countries, and have cast their gods into the fire: for they *were* no gods, but the work of men’s hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them. Now therefore, O LORD our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou *art* the LORD, *even* thou only.<sup>13</sup>

The parallel is clear. Hezekiah asks not for deliverance for the sake of himself or his people, not primarily for their relief, but that the Lord would show Himself to be the true God, over against all other so-called gods. As Biblical Christianity comes under greater and greater scrutiny, and as persecution looms larger and larger on the horizon, those who sing Psalm 115 and others like it, will have that verbal reinforcement of walking not by sight, but by faith in the God who does whatsoever He pleases in the earth and heaven, taking comfort that no weapon formed against the people of God will prosper, and every tongue that rises against them shall be condemned.<sup>14</sup>

This sovereignty of God is on full display in verse three, as the phrasing by the Psalmist is universal and unlimited. The use of the perfect verb tense in Hebrew gives this a sense of purposeful finality—“All that God pleased, He did.” Viewed from the divine perspective, it is accomplished, certain, and sure. God is in the heavens, unrestrained by any creaturely weakness—He is the heavenly God, uncreated, all-powerful, unlimited in His work and desire, and so He purposes and does all He pleases, and is uninfluenced from without. For the Psalmist this means that even the taunts of the wicked, and the persecuting circumstances under which the people

of God find themselves, are not outside of the purpose and doing of God. He works, and none can restrain His hand to tell Him, “What doest thou?”<sup>15</sup> He works good and glory even in the calamities and afflictions of this world, and will do in them beyond what we can ask or think. Circumstances come and go, the advantages of the people of God rise and fall, their credit with the world waxes and wanes, but God works all in all, and that not without direction, but indeed with great providential purpose and care of all His own, advancing His own glory. Implied in this declaration is the same truth Christ spoke to Pilate, when before that unbelieving governor. Pilate believed he had some kind of determinative authority over Christ that demanded His deference and reverence. Instead, Christ reminded the earthly governor that he himself was on a leash which extended from heaven itself, confidently and infallibly asserting, “Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.”<sup>16</sup> This is the declaration of God’s people in every afflicting and persecuting circumstance, for these things to do come upon us by chance or happenstance, our times are in the Lord’s hands.<sup>17</sup> When calamity or persecution comes, when affliction or trouble strikes, the people of God are never left without direction from the Word of the Lord, and are therefore never without hope and confidence in the promises and care of God.

In verses four through seven, the Psalmist, under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, develops a taunt of his own. Our God is in the heavens, uncreated, the idols of men are created—made by men, the works of their hands. They are not living, but dead—men do not create living things. Our God is the living God, a Most Pure Spirit,<sup>18</sup> and the Creator of men, who ought to give Him glory and reverence, with awe. Instead, they give their gold and silver to idols, fashioning false gods that cannot save. These gods of the unbelieving world do not speak, see, hear, smell, handle, nor walk. That is, they have nothing to declare, are insensible to the world around them, can do nothing at all, and cannot go about anywhere, unless they are carried by their makers. This in contrast to the true God, who does all that He pleases to do. The people of God are here called away from every competitor to the true and living God in their thoughts, affections, hearing and obeying; in their faith, resting upon Him, trusting in Him, and being loyal to Him. We may with some equivocation say that the idols of our age are not “gold and silver” in the same way that those of old were. We may even say some “idols” speak today, in that some entertainment or political figures serve as idols for many. But truly, if they speak not according to the Word of the Lord, it is because there is no light in them.<sup>22</sup>

11. Psalm 115:3.

12. See also Isaiah chapters 36–37.

13. Isaiah 37:18–20.

14. 2 Corinthians 4:8–18; 5:6–9; Isaiah 54:17.

15. Daniel 4:35.

16. John 19:10–11.

17. Psalm 31:15.

18. WCF 2.1.

The end of the worshippers of such idols is clear—they shall be made like them: blind, deaf, dumb, impotent, and finally, truly without those signs of life, dead.

Our brief essay ends with verse nine, which opens the rest of the Psalm with the phrase: “The LORD is their help and shield.” The imperative precedes the declaration, calling upon the people of God, “Israel” to trust in the Lord, for He is the help and shield of His people. Note that this trust is not empty, without content. We are counseled here to come to the Lord in childlike trust that although our enemies are too strong for us, although they taunt and deride, and looking at outward circumstances only, they ask, “where is your God?” Our answer, as the people of God, is that we have a Protector that they cannot see, and do not hear, who is our Help, our Stay and Support, our Redeemer and Savior, who protects and preserves us, securely in His eternal Kingdom.

## THE EDITORS

For fuller biographies see the prior issue.

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## Errata for Previous Issues

**Issue 18 (2022):** The reader will kindly note the following corrections noted by attentive readers.

Page 7. “No less an individual than Archibald Alexander...” Read “Archibald Alexander Hodge”.

Pages 9–10. “. . . an understanding at odds with the (Jeffersonian) understanding of the Republic...” Dabney was actually a Jeffersonian politically. Jefferson affirmed the former compact theory (evidenced, for example, by his Virginia Resolutions).

Page 10. “(whose wife was a first cousin of Dabney’s wife)” The women were both Morrissions, but there seems to be no way to connect them as first cousins.

Page 10. Contrary to the author’s claim, Dabney was in agreement with most of his southern Presbyterian contemporaries and forebears in condemning the African slave trade, while defending the maintenance of the institution of slavery.

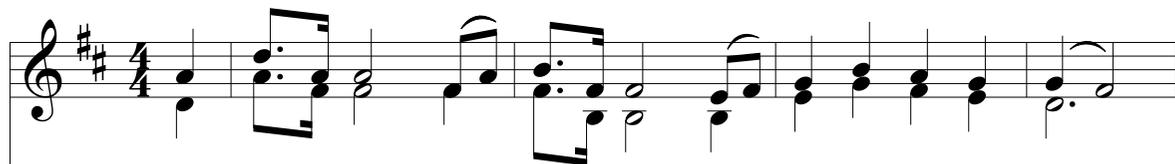
Page 37. “he would die there in 1896”. Read “1898”.

Page 225. “according to E. T. Thompson’s PCUS perspective”. Read “W. E. Thompson’s”.

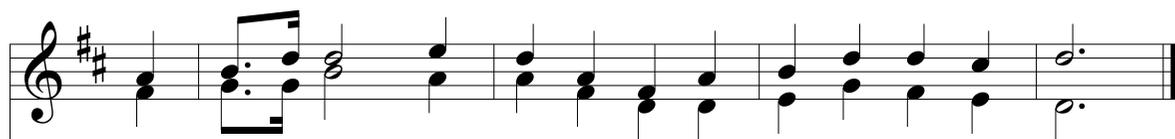
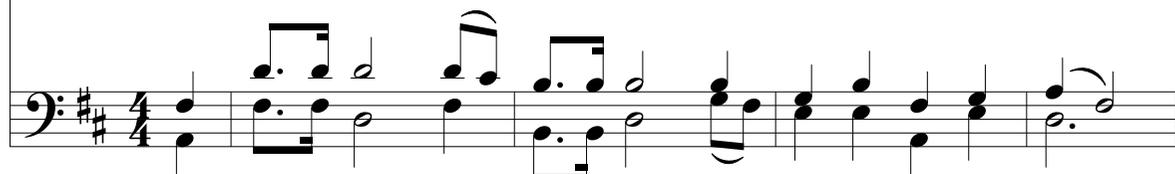
# Psalm 115:1-9

Lo-Lanu

Todd L. Ruddell



<sup>1</sup>Not un - to us, LORD, not to us, but do thou glo - ry take  
<sup>2</sup>O where-fore should the hea-then say, Where is their God now gone?  
<sup>4</sup>Their i - dols sil - ver are and gold, work of men's hands they be.  
<sup>6</sup>Ears have they, but they do not hear; nos - es, but sa - vour not;  
<sup>8</sup>Like them their mak - ers are, and all on them their trust that build.



Un - to thy name, ev'n for thy truth, and for thy mer - cy's sake.  
<sup>3</sup>But our God in the heav-ens is, what pleas'd him he hath done.  
<sup>5</sup>Mouths have they, but they do not speak; and eyes, but do not see;  
<sup>7</sup>Hands, feet, but han - dle not, nor walk; nor speak they through their throat.  
<sup>9</sup>O Is - rel, trust thou in the LORD, he is their help and shield.

