

IN GODS THEY TRUST

PSALM 115 NOVEMBER 29, 2020

In 1859, before a crowd of 25,000 people, Charles Blondin stepped out onto a tightrope strung across Niagara Falls. He was one of history's most famous ropedancers and that day in June was a master performance. Not only did he walk the rope, he also ran on it, sat on it, lay down on it, and somersaulted along it. He carried out an old-timey camera on his back 200 feet over the span and snapped a picture of the crowd. He even took out a small stove so he could cook an omelet, lowering it to passengers on the famous *Maid Of The Mist* boat below.¹

If we saw David Copperfield or David Blaine doing it today, we'd assume it was some sort of camera trick. But, Charles Blondin was the real deal. You can look at photographs of him performing some of these feats, including carrying his manager Harry Colcord on his back from one side to another.

It's reported that, on one occasion, after carrying Harry across the rope, Blondin "turned to a man in the crowd and asked him, 'Do you think I could do that with you?' 'Of course,' said the man. 'I just saw you do it.' 'Well then,' said Blondin, 'Hop on and I'll carry you across.' 'Not on your life,' said the bystander."²

Psalm 115 is a song about trust. It compares the gods of this world to the God of heaven and confidently declares that Jehovah is not only trustworthy, but generous and caring and giving attention to you. Though many scholars feel that the song was written during a time of national distress, by the time the music ends, any singer would have their hearts filled to the brim with joy and confidence and excitement about what God was up to and what was still to come - that God was going to continue His gracious, extravagant work in their midst.

But the Psalm gives us this image: While God's people sing of His greatness, outside there's a crowd of unbelievers mocking God and His people. After all, how could an invisible God do anything?

How do we respond to a world that ridicules faith in the unseen? More importantly, how can we hang the weight of our lives, full of very real difficulties and obstacles on a God we cannot see? Psalm 115 not only gives us assurance, but sends us on our way with it *rejoicing*, so that the phrase 'In God we trust' isn't just some tired slogan, but something we apply to the steps of our lives.

We begin in verse 1.

Psalm 115:1 - ¹Not to us, Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory because of your faithful love, because of your truth.

This song includes request for deliverance, excitement about God's blessing in our lives and anticipation of our future eternity in heaven, but along the way we're never to lose sight of the fact that it *all* comes from the Lord. He is the fount of all good. There's nothing in us that merits what God graciously gives. It is He Who is Sovereign, it is He who deserves all glory.

We notice that they repeat that phrase, "not to us." Have you ever had someone say, "Thank you," then when you say, "Oh, don't mention it," they stop you and look you in the eye and say, "No...

¹ <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-daredevil-of-niagara-falls-110492884/>

² James Montgomery Boice *Psalms Volume 3*

thank you.” There’s a sincerity in this opening line. The singers truly want all glory to go to God. When a person gets saved, God does a work of *conforming* Christians to be like Jesus Christ, but we admit that there’s still a part of us that wants glory for ourselves. There’s a fundamental change that needs to happen in our minds. In fact, humans have been so ruined by sin that we need a *new* mind given to us - the mind of Christ.³ Right from the beginning of this moment of worship, the singers jettison any desire for glory and instead offer their hearts to the Lord alone.

The opening of the song also reminds us of God’s love and truth. These are not only aspects of who God is, they are demonstrations of His incredible generosity. It is by God’s mercy, His faithful love, that we are not consumed. It is by His revealed truth that we are set free from bondage to sin.

Some of you are contemplating retirement and what you’ll “do” once you’ve clocked out for the last time. We can’t fathom all the things God *could* be doing with His ‘time’ and power. What has He decided to do? He has decided to be God *with* us.

Psalm 115:2 - ²Why should the nations say, “Where is their God?”

Sometimes the world asks this question as a taunt and an insult. Sometimes it asks in anger and frustration, like when people say, “If God exists, why is there suffering?”

From our perspective there are two ways to think about verse 2. One is that it’s a prayer to God, asking Him to make Himself known in the world. In Acts 4 the disciples pray that God would do great and dramatic things in their midst so that the world would know that Jesus is Messiah. But we can also see verse 2 as a rhetorical question. Any *objective* observer has to admit there is a God outside our universe. One who designs. One who intervenes. One who revealed Himself when He came in human flesh. “[God’s] invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what he has made.”⁴ We can see the miraculous work of providence in every generation and every place throughout history.

Here is the simple answer to the question, though:

Psalm 115:3 - ³Our God is in heaven and does whatever he pleases.

There is a sureness in this declaration. God is not just some sort of force. He’s a Person and He is in charge. No one can outmaneuver Him. No one can overthrow Him. No one can hide from Him. No one can lay a hand on Him or remove Him from His throne. He does whatever He pleases.

What *does* He please to do? Again, we consider all that God *could* be doing right now and then examine what He says brings Him pleasure. The Bible says it pleases God to interact with us.⁵ It pleases Him to deal with the problem of sin.⁶ It pleases Him to watch sinners repent.⁷ It pleases Him to adorn His people with salvation.⁸ It pleases Him to be with *you*.⁹ It pleases God to hold every atom of the cosmos together by His power, to raise up kingdoms and put down kingdoms, to

³ 1 Corinthians 2:16

⁴ Romans 1:20

⁵ 1 Kings 3:9-10

⁶ Isaiah 53:10

⁷ Luke 15:7

⁸ Psalm 149:4

⁹ Zephaniah 3:17

change times and seasons in order to accomplish His unstoppable plan of grace in our lives and in this world. While the world mocks and ignores, this is what God does.

So now, let's look for a moment at *their* gods.

Psalm 115:4-7 - ⁴Their idols are silver and gold, made by human hands. ⁵They have mouths but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see. ⁶They have ears but cannot hear, noses, but cannot smell. ⁷They have hands but cannot feel, feet, but cannot walk. They cannot make a sound with their throats.

Modern man may see himself as much more sophisticated than these ancient pagans who bowed down to statues of silver and gold, but the gods they worship today are just as powerless. Martin Lloyd-Jones wrote:

"A man's god is that for which he lives, for which he is prepared to give his time, his energy, his money, that which stimulates him and rouses him, excites, and enthuses him."¹⁰

Today, the gods of man are often possessions or systems that make promises of security or a better world, yet they are just as powerless as a statue made out silver that tarnishes or gold that melts.

In 2013, the US government spent \$2billion to build healthcare.gov, a website that promised a healthier future for anyone and everyone in America. Its performance at launch was so abysmal that only *six* people in the entire country were able to sign up on the first day.¹¹ As a *political* idol, it was just like what's being described in these verses. If your god can be stolen or conquered or crash or voted out of power, then what sort of god is that?

We can contrast the gods of this world with the God of the Bible through each point in these verses. Our God was not fashioned out of materials mined from the earth. He made creation from nothing. Our God *does speak*. He speaks life into existence. He speaks commands to His people. He speaks kindness to the undeserving. Our God *sees* everything. His eyes roam to and fro, with nothing hidden from His gaze. We're told He never takes His eyes off of us at any moment. Our God also *hears*. He hears our prayers and our praises. He's listening for us, even for our groanings. He hears cries for help and calls for justice. Hearing the cries of the needy, He brings comfort. Our God even *smells!* Our praises rise like incense to Him, bringing Him pleasure and the smoke of His wrath billows from His nostrils. His *hand* is mighty to save and is placed in loving care on each one of His people. His hands are open to receive us. With His *feet* He walks with us, lighting our way along the path. With His *voice* He comforts and supports, He roars in victory and with it He thunders His decrees. He speaks and it is done.

Psalm 115:8 - ⁸Those who make them are just like them, as are all who trust in them.

Ultimately, those who serve some other god end up the same: Tarnished, vulnerable, dead and wasted. If you're not a Christian you're headed for this same end. Looking back, it's easy to say there's no difference between Ra and Baal, Zeus and Ganesh. But the truth is, there's no difference between them and any *modern* system that you're trying to hang the weight of your life upon, not when it comes to your eternity. No difference between Vishnu and what men blasphemously call the

¹⁰ Steven J. Lawson *Holman Old Testament Commentary: Psalms 76-150*

¹¹ <https://www.mcall.com/news/watchdog/mc-obamacare-website-failure-watchdog-20160224-column.html>

almighty dollar. If your God is not outside time and space, you've got a real problem. Because this life will soon be over and you are going to stand before your Creator and be judged.

Psalm 115:9-11 - ⁹Israel, trust in the Lord! He is their help and shield. ¹⁰House of Aaron, trust in the Lord! He is their help and shield. ¹¹You who fear the Lord, trust in the Lord! He is their help and shield.

James Montgomery Boice writes:

“If God tells us something once we should listen very carefully, because He is God. If He says something twice we should pay the most strict attention. How then if He repeats something three times? In that case, we should drop everything else we are doing, give our full attention to, study, ponder, memorize, meditate on and joyfully obey what God has said.”¹²

Trust the Lord! In the Bible, to trust means that we are to boldly, confidently make God our refuge. To hang the weight of our lives on Him as Protector and Provider. To rely on His guidance for our courses and choices.

In Israel there were different levels of separation among God's people that we see delineated here. You have the nation, the priests and then 'God-fearers' who weren't ethnic Jews but had joined in with their assembly. And, under the law, there were distinct rules and privileges for each group.

Now, Jesus Christ has brought us into a *new* covenant. All those walls of separation and distinction have been broken down. Now we are, altogether, a family, a single generation of royal priests. It doesn't matter if you work behind a pulpit or a pipe fitter. All have been unified in grace and purpose. Applying these verses, we are reminded that God is not simply to be acknowledged, but He is to be *trusted*. That He is the help we need for our nation, for our ministry, for our personal lives. And not only is He our help, He is our *shield*. In battle, it is the shield that sustains the blows, guarding the one behind it. Instead of *you* taking the impact from the sword or arrow, the shield does.

In *How To Train Your Dragon*, one of the Viking warriors is training young recruits in how to defend themselves against the attacks of their fire-breathing foes. He says, *“Your most important piece of equipment is your shield. If you must make a choice between a sword or a shield, take the shield.”*

With God as our help and shield, we don't need to pay attention to the noise of the world. Whether it is mocking or threatening, we can persevere in confidence because our God is with us. And, as we saw in our study of Psalm 138, we need not be *afraid* of any foe, whether earthly or supernatural, because God is with us and for us and shields us with His limitless love and strength.

Psalm 115:12-13 - ¹²The Lord remembers us and will bless us. He will bless the house of Israel; he will bless the house of Aaron; ¹³he will bless those who fear the Lord— small and great alike.

God had given the nation of Israel covenant promises for physical blessings. He will not cancel out those promises. But to *us* different promises are made. When God speaks to us about the blessings He intends for our lives as Christians in the Church age, they aren't for physical health and wealth. Rather, the promises are spiritual and eternal in nature. We learn in the New Testament that God

¹² James Montgomery Boice *Psalms Volume 3*

blesses His people with spiritual growth and the development of spiritual fruit by which we bless others and build up the Church. We're told that God's promises to bless us with wisdom and increased faith and expanding joy and a greater capacity to serve others and endure hardship and bring honor to God. We also find that God's blessings for us include a future plan for us to inherit the Kingdom, to see God, and receive heavenly rewards once this life comes to an end.

God's *heart* has not changed. As He remembers Israel, He remembers us. Jesus promised He would never leave us or forsake us. Instead, He busies Himself in a constant effort to accomplish His unbreakable promises. And those promises will not only be kept to a certain few who seem significant or important from our way of thinking, they will be kept to *all*, both small and great alike.

Psalm 115:14-15 - ¹⁴May the Lord add to your numbers, both yours and your children's. ¹⁵May you be blessed by the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.

Scholars tell us that the language used here indicates that God *heaps* blessings on His people. Piles of them. The Lord isn't stingy or withholding. He's *extravagant* in His gifts and kindness.

There's an important contrast here: The Israelites were all too familiar with the gods of Canaan which demanded people burn their own children in sacrifice. The same thing happens so often today. People sacrificing children on the altar of convenience or career. But then we see the God of the Bible, who loves you *and* your children. Who invites your whole family to be brought together in a life of hopeful faith, filled with spiritual blessings. A God who lavishes love on a thousand generations. He's not some sort of God who is only effective at harvest time or in certain geographical locations. He's not only effective for four years at a time. He is always powerful, always King, always working.

Psalm 115:16 - ¹⁶The heavens are the Lord's, but the earth he has given to the human race.

As we trust God and go His way, He then trusts *us* to steward the world. He has given it to us as a gift that we might enjoy it and live in it and use it, but along with that we have a responsibility to tend it as God would. He has shared dominion with us, because He is generous. We should approach our relationship to the physical world in a Godly way, which means prioritizing compassion toward *people*, not being needlessly wasteful, and cherishing God's creation.

Psalm 115:17-18 - ¹⁷It is not the dead who praise the Lord, nor any of those descending into the silence of death. ¹⁸But we will bless the Lord, both now and forever. Hallelujah!

This is not suggesting soul sleep or that there's no worship in heaven (much the contrary). It's simply saying that, for *this* life, once we die, we no longer offer God praise on the earth. The opportunities and responsibilities for worshipping God, giving Him glory, doing His work and spreading His word are for the living. And so, the song ends with a loud call of "hallelujah," which means "Praise the Lord!" We're to be like all the people involved in passing the olympic torch and keeping it aflame. We are to see what God has done for us and turn around and bless Him back. Of course, we cannot do for Him what He has done for us. But we can turn back and bless Him with loving, obedient, joyful hearts, full of praise and confidence.

Verse 17 gives us one more thing to think about: It's a way for us to judge whether we're *spiritually* dead or not. To be spiritually alive means we not only believe God and trust Him, but that we are praising Him, blessing Him, diverting the flow of our lives to bring Him glory. Are you on an ascending path, leading to heaven or a descending road, leading to death?

All around us there is difficulty, darkness, not to mention the jeers of the unbelieving world. We can still be sure God is good, that He is with us and that we can trust Him.

When Charles Blondin invited his manager, Harry Colcord onto his back for what seemed an impossible journey, he gave his manager the following instructions: “Look up, Harry.... you are no longer Colcord, you are Blondin. Until I clear this place be a part of me, mind, body, and soul. If I sway, sway with me. Do not attempt to do any balancing yourself.”¹³

God invites us to rest securely in Him on this death-defying walk from shore to shore. He can do what no other god can. He can and will deliver us across. We want to be people who don't simply watch with the crowd, but join Him in the fantastic, bringing Him glory through the offering of our lives. He's ready to take us on and He can be trusted, both now and forever. Hallelujah!

¹³ <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-daredevil-of-niagara-falls-110492884/>