

To Your Name Give Glory

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Bible Verse: Psalm 115
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Well, our time tonight in Scripture is going to come from Psalm 115 and I invite you to turn to that text with me. Psalm 115. It's such an encouragement to week by week see you coming on Tuesday evenings, being with us after a long day of work for many of you, and I trust the Lord will bless his word to your heart as we look at it here this evening.

Psalm 115, beginning in verse 1.

1 Not to us, O LORD, not to us, But to Your name give glory Because of Your lovingkindness, because of Your truth. 2 Why should the nations say, "Where, now, is their God?" 3 But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases. 4 Their idols are silver and gold, The work of man's hands. 5 They have mouths, but they cannot speak; They have eyes, but they cannot see; 6 They have ears, but they cannot hear; They have noses, but they cannot smell; 7 They have hands, but they cannot feel; They have feet, but they cannot walk; They cannot make a sound with their throat. 8 Those who make them will become like them, Everyone who trusts in them. 9 O Israel, trust in the LORD; He is their help and their shield. 10 O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD; He is their help and their shield. 11 You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD; He is their help and their shield. 12 The LORD has been mindful of us; He will bless us; He will bless the house of Israel; He will bless the house of Aaron. 13 He will bless those who fear the LORD, The small together with the great. 14 May the LORD give you increase, You and your children. 15 May you be blessed of the LORD, Maker of heaven and earth. 16 The heavens are the heavens of the LORD, But the earth He has given to the sons of men. 17 The dead do not praise the LORD, Nor do any who go down into silence; 18 But as for us, we will bless the LORD From this time forth and forever. Praise the LORD!

Psalm 115 calls you to consider the object of your trust, to contemplate who the Lord is especially in contrast with the false gods of the world. As it does this, it exposes idolatry for the sham that it is, the scam that it is. It exposes idolatry and by contrast extols the fear of the Lord.

Now there is no inscription to tell us who wrote this song, there is no indication of the occasion upon which this text was written, but the focus on the nation of Israel that we saw there in the middle of it, Israel, Aaron, those who fear the Lord, the national emphasis here fits with the Egyptian Hallel which is giving praise to God and was specifically read during the feast of Passover when the Jews remembered their deliverance from Egypt by the powerful hand of God. There are those, many commentators, that will say that it reads like a responsive reading. The reader would say this and the audience would respond back and forth, but there's nothing in the text itself that indicates that and so we're just going to let the text speak without trying to put that artificial construct upon what is said. We'll break it into three sections here tonight and the Psalm opens up, first of all, with an expression of exclusive faith in God, an expression of exclusive faith in God, and the psalmist gives all the glory to God alone. And the title of tonight's message, "To Your Name Give Glory," to your name give glory comes from this first verse.

Look at it again with me. "Not to us, O LORD, not to us." There's this emphatic rejection of boasting that is consistent with what the New Testament describes to be true of genuine salvation lest any man should boast. Not of works lest any man should boast, in that same spirit, the psalmist opens up and says, "Not to us, we claim no glory for ourselves, but by contrast to Your name give glory." He ascribes praise and honor to the name of God and the repetition here is a fine checkpoint for us spiritually because of its emphasis. The repetition gives us a sense of humility and a sense of unworthiness as he goes and approaches God to honor him in praise. The psalmist claims nothing for himself, nothing for his people. There is no claim of merit. There is no claim of deserving. There is no sense of boasting whatsoever. He disclaims all of that from the start. It's as if he rinses the platter clean and then with a clean platter puts forth an offering of praise before the Lord. And it is so fitting for us to keep that in mind and to realize the exclusivity of the glory of God. God does not share his glory with anyone and certainly we, as his people, most recognize that and most embrace that. It reminds me of what is said in John 3:30, "He must increase but I must decrease," John the Baptist said. God does not share his glory with anyone and as we grow in our sanctification, we understand that more and more. We want God to get all of the glory from our lives. We want no recognition for our own sake. Isaiah 42:8 says this, "I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, Nor My praise to graven images." And Psalm 115 reads as though it were an expansion and an exposition of that great theme, the exclusive glory of the name of God and by contrast the rejection of graven images.

And so what we find here is, in light of that verse from Isaiah that I just read, "I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another," what the psalmist does here is he conforms his own heart, he conforms his own affections with that very sentiment, and from the outset he declares his commitment to praise God and to deny self. And with that denial of self in mind, let me just take you to a New Testament passage that I really need to preach on before long, Mark 8. It's been on my mind to preach on this for a long time and in the providence of God I just haven't gotten to it yet. Mark 8:34. The entire call to discipleship to the Lord Jesus Christ is this utter and complete self-denial. Verse 34, Jesus "summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said

to them," this is Mark 8:34, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels." You see, Old Testament and New Testament, there is this underlying premise right on the surface of the pages that to follow Christ means to deny yourself. It is an utter rejection of the idea that we come to the Lord for a sense of personal fulfillment, we come to the Lord and, you know, and you follow Jesus so that you can get what you want out of life and know earthly blessings. No, that's a complete contradiction of what we're seeing here in Scripture. "Not to us. It's not about me, O God, it's not my glory that I seek. I seek Yours and I seek Yours alone." And there is this fundamental principle of self-denial in true biblical salvation and in true Christianity that we really need to recover the sense of that so that we have a right view of the world in which we live and our place in it. I've said in the past, it's not original to me, that the first principle of understanding is to realize that there is a God and you are not he, and so there's just this, there is this denial of self that is at the core of true praise and it's very refreshing to read a Psalm that is giving us instruction in this.

Now why is it, we ask this question a lot, the Psalms evoke this question a lot, why is it, then, that we praise God? Why is it that we honor him? Well, understand that it's good for us to give thanks to him for the blessings that he gives, it's good for us to thank him for material comforts and spiritual blessings even, to thank him for our salvation, to thank him for our hope of heaven and 10,000 blessings beside, it's all good and well to do that, but at the core of it and what we want to clarify in our thinking here this evening, is that the core of our praise is related to the perfections of God and who he is. The other things are the gifts that he gives and we are grateful for them, but we need to go beyond the gifts in order to give praise to the giver and to honor him for his intrinsic worth.

That's what we see the psalmist doing at the end there of verse 1. Why is it that he gives glory to the name of Yahweh? Well, he says it there in verse 1, "Because of Your lovingkindness, because of Your truth." He's honoring God for his loyal love. He's honoring God for his faithfulness to his people. "God, this is who You are and it is pure and it is lovely and it is excellent, and these things are intrinsic to Your very essence. And so, God, I honor You from the start for who You are. I praise You according to Your perfections. I am not like that in myself so, Father, the glory could never go to me. It goes to Your majestic excellence alone." And that sets the tone for the entire Psalm.

Now as we've said often in recent days, the name of God is a shorthand reference to the fullness of his character, the fullness of his reputation and who he is. He is the God who keeps covenant with his people. He's the God who saves them and redeems them and then he protects them and keeps them and shows loyal love to them even when they are undeserving of it, and so because God is like that, we respond to him with praise. And again, the New Testament sense of these principles leads us to this. Was it not in your ungodliness that the Lord Jesus Christ came and saved you if you're in Christ? You did

not achieve salvation by reaching a certain level of good moral goodness, of moral rectitude in your life. It was because the Spirit of God convicted you of your pride and your sin and, you know, every aspect of your ungodliness and your separation from God, the Spirit of God convicted you of that and then gave new life to you, breathed new life into you, granted you faith and repentance so that even the faith that unites you with Christ was a gift from God himself. So we are utterly, we are humbled by the law of God because it convicts us of our sin but we're also humbled in the presence of such wonderful grace that was bestowed on us in our great unworthiness, and so how could it be any other than that the heart of a true believer would be exclusively focused on giving praise to his God for who he is? He showed care to you while you were a rebel. He showed grace to you while you were a wretch. He brought you to himself, he drew you to himself while you were running away, and while your back was turned and your heart was hard, the Lord softened you and drew you to himself and because of that he gets all of the glory and we love him and we praise him for that.

Now maybe some of you are here not in Christ. You can't generate that kind of faith in your own heart. If you're here and you're not in Christ, you just need to go to God and ask him to be merciful to you the sinner and to understand that you need a gracious act of God to come to him in the first place. And if that is an urgent sense on your heart, just keep seeking him, that's all I can tell you. There's no magic formula. There's no magic prayer that you can do. You could walk down the aisle and it wouldn't do you a bit of spiritual good. It's because you need a work of God in your heart and you just go to him humbly and you ask him to be merciful to you and put yourself in the place, as you've done this evening, put yourself in the place where you're hearing the word of God, open your Bible and read it because faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of God, hearing by the word of Christ, and all of these things condition us to realize that it was not by our hand, not by our righteousness, not by our power, not by our ingenuity that we were saved, it was a gracious work of God and therefore to his name be the glory. Not to us. Not to us.

Now with that established clearly in the psalmist's mind, and in our minds hopefully by the help of the Holy Spirit, he now turns to skeptics and addresses the skeptics who would question his faith, who would mock his God. I love the boldness of this. He stands up, as it were, before nations, he stands in the speaking well of the United Nations, so to speak, and rejects all of their ungodliness, rejects all of their godlessness. He says in verse 2, "Why should the nations say, 'Where, now, is their God?'" Now he says, "Why would you say that? Let me explain to you the foolishness of your own statement and of your own spiritual condition."

Now part of the issue here was that Israel worshiped an invisible God just, you know, as we do, and it made for an easy taunt by their enemies when they faced hardship. Foreigners assumed that an unseen God was no God at all, and so, "Where is your God?" You know, they can't point to anything. There's nothing visible. They don't use statues. It's a violation of the second commandment. There is no visible manifestation of God that they could point to, and so the foreigners assumed that an unseen God was no God at all.

Now today the mocking scorn of the world is no different. It's the same spirit of willful unbelief and I get weary of the foolish mocking that comes as you see, talk with people or see things on social media and all of that as people mock believers for their "imaginary friend." You've heard that phrase, right? People talk about, "Yeah, tell me about your imaginary friend." And it's that same spirit of skepticism and mocking that is directed against the true people of God, you know, as if God's manifestation of himself in creation wasn't evidence enough, as if God's manifestation in their own conscience wasn't enough, as if God's revelation in the canon of Scripture, the 66 books of the Bible was not enough, as if the work of God in conversion was not enough, you know, as if none of these things mattered and everything is just thrown over the shoulder that is the way that God has revealed himself. I'm forgetting one of the C's as I stand here. That's all right. I'm ashamed of myself but at least it popped back in my mind in time. God has revealed himself in the Lord Jesus Christ. We measure time by the appearance of Christ in the world. The New Testament reveals who Christ was and shows who he is and Jesus said, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father." So you have creation and conscience and the canon and Christ and conversion, the church, all of these things giving abundant evidence of the reality of the living invisible God so that they are without excuse. Their unbelief is morally culpable. It is willful.

And in a stunning reversal of the mocking, the psalmist asserts against the godless in verse 3, "our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases." It's a statement of utter divine sovereignty, and to greatly simplify it, he's simply saying this, "Our God is in the heavens where He rules the universe, and He does whatever is consistent with His divine purpose and with His divine character. And my mocking friend, my scoffing critic in front of me, that explains why you cannot see Him. He's too high and far above you for your sinful eyes to behold Him. And if you did behold Him, you would be incinerated on the spot. No man can see Him and live. The problem is not that there is no God, the problem is that you are a sinful creature separated from Him and you can't reach into heaven where His presence is manifested. The problem is you, not the invisibility of God. He is too far above you, that's why you cannot see Him."

So this Psalm opens with this ringing statement of exclusive faith in the true God of Scripture, but he's not done yet here roasting his critics, roasting the spiritual opposition. He goes on to a second point here this evening: the evident folly of idols. The evident folly of idols. We saw the exclusive faith in God, now secondly we see the evident folly of idols, and what he does is he contrasts the idols of nations now with this living God who is sovereign over all that he just asserted.

Look at verses 4 through 7. He says, "Their idols are silver and gold, The work of man's hands." They're costly materials, they can look pleasing to the human eye, I suppose, but they're only the work of man. They have nothing to do with any spiritual reality whatsoever. It's simply a human product. And he goes on to show the complete futility of these graven images which would apply to the same images that we see around us in false religions today.

Verse 5, "They have mouths, but they cannot speak; They have eyes, but they cannot see; They have ears, but they cannot hear; They have noses, but they cannot smell; They have hands, but they cannot feel; They have feet, but they cannot walk; They cannot make a sound with their throat." This is a total obvious travesty. This is a joke. You sculpture something into an image and give it human characteristics but it has no life. It is not a living God, it is a dead senseless idol and nothing more as shown by the fact that all of these artistic characteristics given to it in the formation of its form produce nothing like human life. They are lifeless. They are unable to act. "You Gentiles," he says, "you simply worship gods of your own making, which is to say they are no God at all."

Isaiah 44, look over there with me. Isaiah gives a resounding parallel, a denunciation showing the folly of idolatry, and I'm going to take the time to read an extended passage here without commenting on it just to give us a sense that false gods are no gods at all. We used to live two blocks away from a Buddhist temple and they had these massive idols that, in one sense, were visually impressive or intimidating, whatever word you want to use and, you know, got all the angry looks of all of that stuff but they were just, you know, they just were a fixed concrete. They couldn't move. They were nothing. It was just physical material that had been shaped and it represented nothing.

Isaiah 44:9,

9 Those who fashion a graven image are all of them futile, and their precious things are of no profit; even their own witnesses fail to see or know, so that they will be put to shame. 10 Who has fashioned a god or cast an idol to no profit? 11 Behold, all his companions will be put to shame, for the craftsmen themselves are mere men. Let them all assemble themselves, let them stand up, let them tremble, let them together be put to shame. 12 The man shapes iron into a cutting tool and does his work over the coals, fashioning it with hammers and working it with his strong arm. He also gets hungry and his strength fails; he drinks no water and becomes weary. 13 Another shapes wood, he extends a measuring line; he outlines it with red chalk. He works it with planes and outlines it with a compass, and makes it like the form of a man, like the beauty of man, so that it may sit in a house. 14 Surely he cuts cedars for himself, and takes a cypress or an oak and raises it for himself among the trees of the forest. He plants a fir, and the rain makes it grow. 15 Then it becomes something for a man to burn, so he takes one of them and warms himself; he also makes a fire to bake bread. He also makes a god and worships it; he makes it a graven image and falls down before it. 16 Half of it he burns in the fire; over this half he eats meat as he roasts a roast and is satisfied. He also warms himself and says, "Aha! I am warm, I have seen the fire." 17 But the rest of it [the exact same wood, in other words, with the rest of the exact same wood] he makes into a god, his graven image. He falls down before it and worships; he also prays to it and says, "Deliver me, for you are my god." 18 They do not know, nor do they understand, for He has smeared over their eyes so that they cannot see and their hearts so that they cannot

comprehend. 19 No one recalls, nor is there knowledge or understanding to say, "I have burned half of it in the fire and also have baked bread over its coals. I roast meat and eat it. Then I make the rest of it into an abomination, I fall down before a block of wood!" 20 He feeds on ashes; a deceived heart has turned him aside. And he cannot deliver himself, nor say, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?"

In other words, he is so dead spiritually that he cannot recognize the foolishness of what he is doing and the self-contradiction of his own religion, and this gives us some insight into the nature of false religion, the nature of idolatry. Beloved, it's not an incidental sin. It's not like it's better to have a false religion than to have no religion at all. Both of them are equally damnable. The invisible God cannot be represented by material things and those who serve in a religion dominated by visible representations of supposedly spiritual matters are violating the second commandment which says, "You shall not make any graven images for yourselves." Idols cannot speak. They cannot move. They cannot listen. They have no power. They have no life. They do not make promises and they do not reveal truth. They are simply lifeless statues that cannot even grunt, let alone give intelligent revelation to their followers.

So going back now to Psalm 115 with those things in mind, he has contrasted the living sovereign God with dead lifeless idols and he makes this concluding statement about the servants of false religion, "Those who make them will become like them, Everyone who trusts in them." Dead idols produce dead worshipers. We become like that which we worship. And so in response to the new life given to us, we worship the living God, he sanctifies us and conforms us to the image of Christ. As we gaze into his glory, the Scriptures say in the New Testament, we are transformed by that glory into greater increasing degrees of conformity to the image of Christ. Idols can't do any of that, they just deaden the heart of those who serve them.

So he's shown the evident folly of idols with his mocking statements against them which are undeniable and irrefutable, and that leads us into the third and final section of the Psalm here tonight: the enduring fear of God. The enduring fear of God. He's come back full-circle now, having contrasted briefly the living God with the folly of idols, now he comes back full-circle to show what the response to that evident contrast should be, the contrast between the true God and false statues should produce a response in the people of God. So he calls them and he shows them that a rejection of idolatry should produce a commitment to worship.

So look at it there in verses 9 through 11 with me. He says, "O Israel, trust in the LORD; He is their help and their shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD; He is their help and their shield." Then he expands it to as broadly as possible, "You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD; He is their help and their shield." And so he calls for a response of faith that trusts this living God who is in the heavens and does whatever he pleases. Because God is the living God, because God is the sovereign God, because he is the God who helps his people, because he is the God who protects them like a shield protects a

soldier in battle, because God is like that, people of God, he says, trust him. Put your confidence in him. Love him and fear him.

And it's interesting as you look back at verse 8, we go through this a little bit quickly and it's easy to miss some of these connections, at the end of verse 8, he had mocked those who were trusting in those lifeless idols, verse 8, they "who make them will become like them, Everyone who trusts in them." That's a false trust, and now joined together like links of a chain, he takes that word "trust" and builds it into the proper response to the living God, and trust is repeated three times in these three verses. "Israel, trust in the LORD. Aaron, trust in the LORD. You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD." He's contrasting genuine living trust with the false dead trust of idol worshipers. And so there's this contrasting triplet in this section, and what he's saying is this, God is faithful to his people. God helps his people. God is true to his people. We've said that these Psalms in the Egyptian Hallel, Psalms 113 through 118, are showing God's compassion on the weak and his mercy on the needy, and here we find this coming out again, "Israel, exercise your trust, put your trust in the God who is like that, the living God who shows compassion to His people."

So there's a mutuality that takes place here. The people of God trust him and they trust him alone, and he in response defends them and delivers them, and it's an opportunity for us to step back and take a look at our own hearts, isn't it? To ask ourselves what it is that we love, what it is that we trust, what's our attitude as we look to the future. Is it one of confidence or one of fear? You know, as fear creeps into our lives sometimes, we need to come back to this call and the Psalm calls us out of that mindset of fear and sometimes anxiety and says, "Remember who your God is, He's the living sovereign God who is faithful to His people, powerful to do and to fulfill whatever He pleases. Remember who your God is and come back to putting your faith and confidence in Him for your hope and your reason to live and your confidence in life." And the breadth of Israel, Aaron, you know, the nation of Israel, the priestly line, "you who fear the LORD," it embraces all believers and it's a call to do just this.

Now with those things said, as we think about it from a New Testament perspective and we remember what Christ has done for us, we have so much more than physical deliverance from him. He saved us from sin. He bore the wrath of God for us at the cross. He imputed his righteousness. He counted his righteousness to be ours and took our sin, the guilt of our sin on himself and took the punishment for it that we might be delivered from the wrath of God and brought into a safe position where all of our sins are forgiven, never to be held against us again. Saved from sin. Saved from Satan. Saved from that diabolical, invisible, supernatural enemy who is the hater of the people of God. Saved from him. Saved from death because Scripture says, "As Christ lives, so also we will live." Saved from hell and brought to heaven instead. The benefits are just endless, literally endless. We will be on the receiving end and we will enjoy the fruit of the Lord's mercy in us forever without end. So when God has done that for us as believers in Christ, then isn't it fitting for us as his people to respond by putting our trust and faith and confidence in him? Giving him the glory alone and trusting him alone for all that affects

us? Of course. And this faith that God has given to us brings us into the realm of the favor of God.

Look at verses 12 and 13 with me. Psalm 115:12 and 13. "The LORD has been mindful of us; He will bless us; He will bless the house of Israel; He will bless the house of Aaron. He will bless those who fear the LORD, The small together with the great." The most unknown believer in the kingdom of God will be on the receiving end of his blessing. Scripture says there aren't many noble in the kingdom of God, there aren't many wise, there aren't many powerful in the world's sense, but we're not worried about that because our trust is in the God who blesses his people. He knows us by name. He counts the number of hairs on our head. He guides our steps and he guides it all in order to do good for us in the end and to bring glory to his own name. So of course we trust him, of course we're confident as we look to the future.

And notice the symmetry with the prior section. Verse 9, Israel. Verse 10, Aaron. Verse 11, you who fear the Lord. Now in verses 12 and 13, he comes back to them, he calls them to trust and then he gives them the promise of blessing that trust brings. Verse 12, "He'll bless the house of Israel, the house of Aaron. He'll bless those who fear the LORD." And this repetition just giving this sense of emphasis to the totality of what he is saying, coming to this whole grand conclusion, this whole simple overarching point that God is mindful of his people. God is mindful of you if you are in Christ. He knows what's on your tongue before you even speak it. There's nowhere you could go that would be outside of his presence. There's no situation that you're in that cannot be redeemed by his power. There is no crisis or trial in your life of which he is not intimately acquainted with all of the details. So this Psalm comes to us with this wonderful expression of the greatness and the goodness and the grace of God and calls you to trust in him.

Now, you know, maybe you're like me, maybe you need this reminder, maybe you need to be called out on the slog of spiritual difficulties that you've found yourself in. Maybe you need to come out of that and have your mind renewed by the truth of these things and to renew your trust in him, and the wonderful thing of it is is that God is gracious even when his people are faithless, even when they forget, even when they stumble in the walk. He is so good, he is so mindful of his people that he'll bless us even then when we come back and we turn back to him. And so, you know, look, it's a really immeasurable blessing to be in Christ, isn't it? It is incalculably wonderful that God has shown, that this God has shown that grace to us. He remembers us. He remembers you to deliver you and to keep all of his good promises to you come what may. And can you not, those of you that have been Christians any length of time at all, can you not look back in your life, see from a later perspective some of the deep valleys that you were in and that the Lord brought you out of them, various kinds of hardship, various kinds of enslavement to sin, various kinds of relational difficulties and the Lord brought you out of them back then? Now maybe you're in some things like that now but doesn't the nature of God, doesn't the pattern of God, doesn't that teach you that you can trust him now in the midst of whatever's happening now on the understanding that in future time, if not in this life, in the life to come, we'll be able to see that God worked it all out for good just exactly like he promised he would do? Isn't that an encouragement to your broken and trembling

heart? Isn't it an encouragement to the sorrow that life just relentlessly inflicts on us sometimes? Isn't it enough to be in the hands of this good and gracious God even if those close to you reject you? Isn't it enough to know that this is my God? Of course it is.

So the psalmist has rehearsed how God blesses the nation, he blesses the priest, he blesses those proselytes to Judaism, those who fear the Lord, and it's a promise, it's a promise made without distinction of social class. It's for the small together with the great, it says there in verse 13. That's another, it's another wonderful reason to love and to honor God. He's not a respecter of persons. Scripture says multiple times in the New Testament there is no partiality with God. Everyone, everyone who comes to him in humble repentant faith is welcomed and receives all of the fullness of the blessings of the Spirit. Everyone that comes in that humble repentant faith to Christ, everyone is received and heaven rejoices over a single sinner who repents. So the most downtrodden and the most marginalized person can look up to Christ and find that all of these promises are made yes in him. In him, in Christ, all of the promises are yes and amen, it says in Corinthians. It's wonderful. It's wonderful. It's wonderful to rehearse this in our minds in our deeply divided political situation of the day, just in the repulsive agitation that people bring on race and economic issues to just try to stir up trouble and division, to realize that there is a refuge, a help and a shield that we can go to, and in him all is peace and comfort and blessing. Verse 13, "He will bless those who fear the LORD, The small together with the great." This is where real unity is found, beloved, it's in Christ. None of the race-based classifications that our country is going headlong into, none of that is going to produce any unity whatsoever. It's just going to deepen the divide all the more. We have to understand that peace and unity are found in Christ alone and to be content there even as the world passes us by, and God blesses us and he keeps his promises of care and protection.

Look at verses 14 and 15. This has echoes of the Aaronic blessing in Numbers 6. "May the LORD give you increase, You and your children. May you be blessed of the LORD, Maker of heaven and earth." That phrase, "Maker of heaven and earth," occurs in subsequent Psalms, in Psalm 121 and Psalm 124. With this blessing that is pronounced on the one who fears the Lord, let's just look back at Numbers 6 for a moment. It's often read as a benediction at the end of our services but you just get from these scriptural benedictions a sense of the favor and the peace and the shalom that the Lord gives to his people. Numbers 6:24, "The LORD bless you, and keep you; The LORD make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace." Pure unmixed goodness coming from the hand of God to his people, and this is the blessing that produces our enduring fear of him, enduring fear in the sense of our loving submission to him, our loving service of him. God is like that and so we give him the glory and we trust him as he prospers his people in this life and in the life to come.

Now in his concluding section here in the last three verses it says this, "The heavens are the heavens of the LORD, But the earth He has given to the sons of men." God owns the heavens, he owns the universe. I remember, I don't know if they still do this, in years gone by you used to be able to buy a star. They had some kind of database and you could

get a star that you named or was named after you or something like that. Talk about a total usurpation of the prerogatives of God. The heavens belong to him. Men can't dole them out like they can their own possessions. But God owns the heavens. He has given man a stewardship on earth, the earth he has given to the sons of men.

He goes on in verse 17 and he says this in a verse that would be easy to misunderstand. He says in verse 17, "The dead do not praise the LORD, Nor do any who go down into silence; But as for us, we will bless the LORD From this time forth and forever." Now understand what he is saying here. He is not denying the resurrection. He is not denying that believers go and enter into the presence of Christ when they die. Paul's very explicit about that in Philippians. You know, he wants to depart and be with Christ for that is very much better. In other places in Scripture, to be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord. This verse is not denying that, it's not even addressing that issue, it's simply making this very simple point: dead people do not praise God on earth. Dead people do not praise God on earth. Their tongue has been silenced. Their voice has been taken out of the choir. Their words have been permanently retired from an earthly perspective, looking at things from under the perspective of the sun.

So what he is saying here is that because the dead are not able to do this before the living, the dead cannot do anything before those who are living on earth because the dead are like that, we will step into the gap, we will praise God, we will honor him, we will bless his name. As long as we are given breath, we will bless him this time forth and going forward forevermore. While we are alive, Christian friends, we must do before men what the dead cannot. We bless God by acknowledging his position of sovereignty, we trust him, we thank him, and in light of all of his sovereign goodness, in light of all of his blessing especially in contrast with the false religion of men, we come full-circle and he concludes the Psalm where it began. It began, "to Your name give glory," it ends in verse 18, "Praise the LORD!" Our God has saved us when we could not save ourselves and for that we gladly give him alone all of the glory. To paraphrase Charles Spurgeon, the dead cannot praise God, the wicked will not praise God, the careless do not praise God, but we will shout hallelujah forever and evermore. Is that the testimony of your heart to this great God?

Let's pray together.

Father, we could not possibly improve on the words of the psalmist and so we simply echo them as we close our time. Father, individually and corporately we say, "Not to us, O LORD, not to us, But to Your name give glory Because of Your loving kindness, because of Your truth." Surely, Lord, You will bless us. Surely, You have been mindful of us. Surely, You will bless those who fear the Lord, the small together with the great. And so we trust You, Father, on the sheer sole testimony of Your word that You will bless those who fear the Lord. We trust You as imperfect and as faltering as our love and submission to You may often be, Father, You know all things, You know that we fear You, we know that You love us, You know that we love You even if oftentimes our lives would seem to contradict it. So look as Peter said, "You know all things, You know that I love You, O Lord," look on us and bless us according to Your goodness, not according to our

faithfulness, and as You do that, Father, we will bless Your holy name from this time forth and forevermore. Praise the LORD! Through Christ our Lord we pray. Amen.

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