

## WE BECOME LIKE WHAT WE WORSHIP

*Sermon Series: Created to Worship*

### Psalm 115:1-18

Chadron Berean Church

So I think we all know the frustration of pursuing something we desire, something we think is going to make us happy or give us a sense of fulfillment or satisfaction, only to be left wanting or longing for something more or something different. It's like the grass is just always greener on the other side. You get to the other side, it's not as green as you thought it would be, and other places always look greener, or better. Why is that? Why does it seem like that sense of satisfaction and fulfillment is just out of reach? It's a simple question we want to answer this morning from Psalm 115 as we return to our theme for this year, *created to worship*. If you have your Bible with you, I encourage you to turn there. However, I am going to be using the *Legacy Standard Bible* again so if you want to follow along in the notes I understand.<sup>1</sup> This is a fairly recent translation and no one here probably has a copy, but I am just pleased by the way it plainly translates the name Hebrew name Yahweh, the personal name for God that means "to be" and emphasizes His self-existence. God told Moses His name was Yahweh (YHWH) or "I AM WHO I AM" (Ex. 3:14).

By way of introduction, this psalm is in a group of psalms known as the hallelujah psalms we call the Egyptian Hallel Psalms because they celebrate the Exodus so it's fitting for our *Life of Moses* series (Psalms 113-118). **Hallel** means "praise" and **Hallelujah** (halelû yāh) means praise the LORD, or "**praise Yahweh**" (Yah being the short form of Yahweh). It's also fitting for this time of year as well since it is recited by Jews at the conclusion of the Passover meal, again celebrating the Exodus.<sup>2</sup> It may be classified as a psalm of communal confidence, meant for the congregation to sing in praise to God<sup>3</sup> which is just one of the many ways we worship God and thus glorify God. We **glorify** God by the many ways we **worship** Him, by our 24/7/265 engaging response to God with our lives. That's really what the psalmist is concerned about: **God getting the glory due to His name.**

*I "Not to us, O Yahweh, 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?"*

### I. **THE GLORY OF YAHWEH. (VV. 1-2)**

Verse 1 says, "*Not to us, but to Your name be the glory.*" The psalmist is calling on Yahweh to **glorify Himself for His own sake**, for His own reputation, and not for His peoples' own interests. The pagan nations who worshipped other gods, or idols, would taunt the living God of Israel for being inactive and the psalmist is saying to God, "*God, you know our situation, and*

*though we need deliverance, it's not about us. Show Your covenant-lovingkindness to us and reveal the truth of who You are by intervening in this situation.*" Now the psalmist begins to set up a contrast between Yahweh and idols.

## II. THE CONTRAST BETWEEN YAHWEH & IDOLS. (VV. 3-7)

*3 But our God is in the heavens;  
He does whatever He pleases."*

So the answer to, "*Where is their God?*" is "*our God is in the heavens.*" Basically, He is not like creation. He is not part of creation. He is above it. **He is the eternal Creator of creation who was never created.** He is totally sovereign over it and unrestricted by it. Therefore, "*He does whatever He pleases.*" He is **sovereign** in His viewpoint and His action.<sup>4</sup> It doesn't matter what people say about God, we know that Yahweh is still on His heavenly throne. Nothing can thwart Him or His plans or His purposes. Isn't this great? The sovereignty of God is not a reason to debate. It's a reason to worship! As for the **idols of the nations**, verse 4 says:

*4 Their idols are silver and gold,  
The work of man's hands.  
5 They have mouths, but they do not speak;  
They have eyes, but they do not see;  
6 They have ears, but they do not hear;  
They have noses, but they do not smell;  
7 As for their hands, they do not feel;  
As for their feet, they do not walk;  
They do not make a sound with their throat.*

So while God is all-powerful, idols are completely powerless, even motionless. They are not above creation, but part of it. They are even subject to men who carved them out of wood or shaped them out of metal. He's referring to the statues or images that people would make out of some created element and then worship it as a god, very much like you might see in the country of India today. And the psalmist is taunting the idols of the nations they hope in. These "gods" are lifeless. They have no senses. They're dull, stupid, empty, and dead. They were basically purchased at IKEA—there was some assembly required of them.<sup>5</sup> Charles Spurgeon said, "*The meanest [lowest] insect has more power of locomotion than the greatest heathen god.*"<sup>6</sup>

**Isaiah 44:14-19** provides another scathing piece of satire on idolatry. He talks about how foolish it is that a man would cut down a tree, burn half of it for firewood and then take the other half to carve into a god and bow down before it. Isaiah says, "*He also prays to it and says, "Deliver me, for you are my god."* *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. 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!” He feeds on ashes; a deceived heart has turned him aside”* (NASB, 1995). So Isaiah really puts it into perspective doesn't he? How foolish to worship something created, instead of the Creator! It isn't the creation that deserves our worship, but the Creator who gives life to everyone and everything.

But isn't it true of us, that our hearts have a terrible propensity towards idols? That's evident by how fast Israel makes a golden calf to worship after God redeems them from Egypt. We might not bow down to a block of wood, but an idol doesn't have to be a literal statue. **An idol could be anything that our heart clings too or relies upon for ultimate security.<sup>7</sup> An idol for us can be anything that takes the place of God in our lives.** Anything we prioritize above God or give our loyalty too, or trust in.<sup>8</sup> It might be our job, money, material possessions, relationships, hobbies, forms of media... even our problems and fears or reputation or self-image can be what we live for and give our attention too. Some of these things I've mentioned aren't inherently wrong or idolatrous – God gives them to us to enjoy and glorify Him with – but they become idols when we start to find our meaning and purpose in them or trust them and let them come between us and God instead of a way to glorify God. They start to steal our worship.

And this can be very subtle and offensive to us, but **at the core of idol worship is self.** We do what we do and pursue what we pursue because we are self-centered. It's about my desires, my wants, my self-image over what God wants or desires in my life. We are saying no to God and bowing down to the idol of self. It's self-worship. One man said, *“Our problem is not that we don't love ourselves enough, our problem is that we love ourselves too much.”*<sup>9</sup> That's why Jesus said we must learn to deny ourselves and love our neighbor as ourselves. We need saving from ourselves. This is just as true for those who bow to the statues and images in ancient Israel. Many were bowing down for their own personal blessings and welfare. They're thinking was, *“I'll go to this god for this blessing, that god for that blessing. One for my farm and one for children.”* Many, the Bible says, were bowing down to Yahweh, not for Yahweh's glory, but for their own personal benefit. They would bow down to Him and to Baal. They were trying to manipulate gods for their own sake. It was all about them and their personal blessings, not the sake of their God. It's a sad commentary on humanity but as good consumers, we can “serve” God for our own gain and not *His glory*. But lets look at now what happens to idol worshippers in verse 8, the center of the psalm. Rather than finding blessings, they find cursing.

### **III. THE CURSE OF IDOL WORSHIPERS. (V. 8)**

*8 Those who make them will become like them,  
Everyone who trusts in them.*

So the psalmist declares that those who worship what is not God, will become *like* that object they worship. Keep in mind he has a lifeless statue in mind. He's not saying that if you worship your car, you'll become a car. What he is saying is that if you are going to worship a created thing that is dull, stupid, empty, and lifeless, you will become spiritually dull and stupid and empty lifeless.<sup>10</sup> You'll become spiritually insensitive and prime for Yah's judgment. You will

have eyes, but not see reality. You have ears, but not hear God's Word or God's truth. In the New Testament (NT), Jesus tested the spiritual receptivity of His audience with parabolic teaching, saying, *"To him who has ears, let him hear."* He even says it to the churches in the book of Revelation. Even believers who aren't living for God's glory are susceptible. The writer of Hebrews says I have much to explain to you, but you are dull of hearing. You can't handle it. You're carnal, worldly. You need spiritual ABC's again (Heb. 5:11-14). Paul says the same thing to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 15:34).

This is a form of God's judgment on people who refuse to worship Creator God. For the sake of time, we can't speak in detail but when you read Romans 1:18-32, it explains our society today. Because man has embraced ideas like evolution and have rejected what is plainly evident about God from creation, man has in divine judgment been "handed over" to the lusts of their own hearts, resulting in degrading passions and depraved minds. **Romans 1:22-23** says, *"Professing to be wise, they became fools, exchanging the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures."* This is why we have professors and doctors and Supreme Court justices who can't tell the difference between a man and a woman. We suppressed the truth about God and have become fools.

When God commissions Isaiah to be a prophet in **Isaiah 6:9-10**, God said, *"Go and tell this people: 'Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.' Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."* This was God's judgment for their idolatry. They would be spiritually dull and insensitive. There are many other passages that speak of idolatry having this anesthetic-like effect on us (Isaiah 6:9-10; 42:17-20; 43:8-10; 44:9, 17-19; Psalm 115:4-8).

We're getting at the answer to our original question now, aren't we? Why does it seem like the grass is always greener? Why do the things we seek to satisfy us leave us feeling emptier? The answer is that we keep exchanging one idol for another, for my sake. This idol doesn't satisfy me so I'll try this idol, and so on. It's a vicious cycle. We weren't made to worship idols. We were made to glorify God. I'm just putting two and two together here, but, ***if we were created to glorify God, that means we will never ultimately be satisfied doing anything if we aren't doing it for His glory.*** You can't undo what you were created to do. You can't buck the system God designed. Everything in this world exists for His glory and you either operate according to that design and find blessing or buck against it to your own ruin. The reason why people today are going to sinful extremes is because they're not satisfied. They're pushing the envelope even further to seek happiness or fulfillment or life. The reality is, we are only moving further away from God's design to our own detriment. Even the atheistic philosopher Fredrich Nietzsche foresaw the disaster that would befall a society that abandoned God and values and lived for self-gratification. Guys, I'm convinced the young man busting tires in a tire shop for minimum wage, doing it for the glory of God, will find more satisfaction than the man who has all this world can offer.

In his book on idolatry, *We Become What We Worship*, G. K. Beale lays out a biblical theology of idolatry. His repeated principle throughout the book is:

**What you revere you resemble, either for ruin or restoration.**<sup>11</sup>

I think this is a fairly evident principle in Psalm 115 and at work in our lives, don't you? We start imitate or reflect, consciously or unconsciously, what we give our attention too or spend time with. Those with kids know this is true. It's kind of scary, but you start to notice as they grow how they imitate you or copy you. They might cook, feed, and discipline their stuffed animals the same way that you do them. Proverbs says, "*Bad company corrupts good character.*" You start to become like the peer group you hang out with. Watch too much media and news? Be careful that every tragedy doesn't become an idol – everything is out of control!

But who were we made to **revere** and **resemble**? Who were we made to **reflect**? In whose image were we created? Genesis 1 tells us we were **created in God's image**. So we want to focus on Him. We want to focus on Jesus, the perfect God-Man, the ultimate example for us, and be **restored/conformed to His image** (Rom. 8:29). We'll wind this psalm down pretty quick.

#### IV. THE BLESSING OF YAHWEH WORSHIPPERS. (VV. 9-11)

*9 O Israel, trust in Yahweh;  
He is their help and their shield.  
10 O house of Aaron, trust in Yahweh;  
He is their help and their shield.  
11 You who fear Yahweh, trust in Yahweh;  
He is their help and their shield.  
12 Yahweh remembered us; He will bless!  
He will bless the house of Israel.  
He will bless the house of Aaron.  
13 He will bless those who fear Yahweh,  
The small together with the great.  
14 May Yahweh give you increase,  
You and your children.  
15 May you be blessed of Yahweh,  
Who made heaven and earth.*

So the psalmist affirms that when one approaches Yahweh appropriately, with a motivation to glorify Him (v. 1), He is truly that person's **help** and **shield**. From the **small** and **great** – from the lowly to the high-profile individual – He takes care of them. Because He is sovereign, He can, and we should **trust** Him. And, while it is ironic, the one who lives for God's glory and not himself, he is the one who finds life and **blessing**. Remind me of Jesus' words in Matthew 10:39, "*For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.*" Verse 16:

*16 The heavens are the heavens of Yahweh,  
But the earth He has given to the sons of men.  
17 It is not the dead that praise Yah,  
And it is none of those who go down to silence;  
18 But as for us, we will bless Yah  
From now until forever.  
Praise Yah! [or hallelujah!]*

I think we can all say “Hallelujah!” to that! But basically, the psalmist ends by reminding us that God created the earth for man. It is a gift He gave us to dwell upon as a place to worship Him from. We are not to worship the creation, but to use it and use our time on the earth to glorify Him. We are to worship Yah while we live on the earth *now*. Verse 17 reminds us that after we die, this unique opportunity we have is gone. We enter into eternity where we will continue to praise Him forever but the unique moment of now is gone.

If you want to end the vicious cycle of idol-chasing in your life this morning, you need to know that Christ is the only way out. He is God. He is Yahweh, who became a man, to die for our sins and His resurrection from the dead proved it. When you return to your Creator, the Bible says your ears are opened and your eyes see again (Is. 32:2-4; Matt. 13:14-16). The veil of spiritual darkness is removed. *“But whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away”* (2 Cor. 3:16). But like I said, just because you are a believer doesn’t mean you’re completely off the hook. You too must live for God’s glory or experience discipline. You too, can be spiritual dull of hearing or blind and shortsighted (2 Peter 1:9). The answer is again repentance—to live for the glory of God and be conformed not to this world, but to the image of the Son. Then you will know His good and pleasing and perfect will (Rom. 12:1-2). And may we be able to pray as Jesus did at the end of His life, *“I have glorified You on earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do”* (John 17:4).

I want to end with a quote from Floyd Barackman’s work called *Practical Christian Theology*: *“It is the Creator’s inherent right to exalt Himself and to receive from His creation all praise, for it is the creature’s duty, whose very existence depends upon the Creator, to glorify His maker... Our highest duty is to glorify the Creator in all that we do (1 Cor. 10:31; 6:20). This means that we are to live in a manner that will bring Him credit and praise. While sin in our lives make us unlike Him and discredits Him, our obedience in His strength manifests His qualities and works in our lives and brings Him praise (Matt. 5:16, 48; cp. John 17:4). We exist for His purpose (Eph. 1:12).”*<sup>12</sup> All God’s people say, “Amen!” I guess we could say, “Hallelujah!”

---

<sup>1</sup> Learn more about the Legacy Standard Bible at <https://lsbible.org/>

<sup>2</sup> Nancy deClaissé-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, ed. E. J. Young, R. K. Harrison, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 853.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Psalms* (2023 Edition), 405.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Goeman, *The Bible Sojourner Podcast, Ep 85: You Become Like What You Worship*, March 13, 2021; cited 13 April 2023.

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*. 2nd ed. Condensed by David Otis Fuller. 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1915), 2:143.

<sup>7</sup> G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 17.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Washer quote, source unknown.

<sup>10</sup> Beale, 16, 21.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>12</sup> Floyd H. Barackman, *Practical Christian Theology: Examining the Great Doctrines of the Faith*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2012), 72.