

July 22/23, 2006

## To Whom? Psalm 115 Jeff Petersen

Earlier this summer Cynci and I loaded up our van along with our four boys and we headed to see Cynci's parents in their family home in Rhode Island. It was a great time; good family time together. But during that trip we drove 3,700 miles...3,700! I was reminded again—this is a big country. It is also a big world. I know everyone thinks the world is getting smaller and smaller. Technology, innovation, communication, travel—all these things are causing the world to shrink and that is definitely true, but it is still pretty big. After all, a typical trip to India for me usually involves a flight to somewhere like Denver or Minneapolis for about an hour and then another flight to Los Angeles or somewhere like that for two or three hours. I get off the plane, check in for the international flight and, after waiting about four or five hours, I then get on a flight that takes 14 hours to cross the Pacific Ocean and end up somewhere like Taipei, Taiwan. I get off the plane and wander around the airport for a couple of hours and then I'm back on the same plane for six more hours across the South China Sea to end up somewhere like Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. I get off and there is another stop, another layover. About four hours more of flying across the Indian Ocean and *bam*—just like that I am there! I am certain, after having made that one-way 12,500 mile, 46-hour journey a couple dozen times, it is still a big world.

Could the reality be that the world is not so big...it's just that we are really, really small? I guess it depends on your perspective. You see, to us, our country and even our world are huge. But actually, in the overall scope of things...they are microscopic. Our sun is 93 million miles from earth. If we were to try to travel there non-stop on a 747, it would take about 6,458 days—that is nearly 18 years! *Boy, do I hope they have more comfortable seats on that flight!* You see, our solar system is so large compared to our planet that our units of measure are entirely inadequate. So instead of measuring in miles, we measure such distances in light years—in other words, how far light travels in a single year... and it travels far and fast.

In fact, if I could ride a beam of light to India instead of a 747... I could make the trip there AND back 7 ½ times IN ONE SECOND. That would be a rush! I would be traveling 186,000 miles per second or 11,600,000 miles per minute which is 669,600,000 miles per hour. *That's faster than some of these trucks go out here on Highway 2!* 5.88 trillion miles per year, that is a light year, the speed of light—5.88 trillion miles. That is the only adequate measure we have for the vastness of space. At that speed the journey to the sun takes a mere 8 minutes...no big deal! Practically next door! Of course, we realize that our sun is just one of billions of stars in our galaxy, the Milky Way. And when we realize our galaxy is 100,000 light years across and that the entire Milky Way is just our little subdivision of space existing along with billions of other galaxies, we begin to get an idea of what BIG really is. In fact, to give it scale, if that Milky Way galaxy were equivalent to the size of North America, our entire solar system—not just our planet—would be the size of a quarter. Somewhere on a speck on the surface of that quarter would be our little earth. Somewhere...not even a speck on that speck...would be us.

Yet in Scripture, Isaiah reminds us that God has measured the breadth of the heavens. He created all these stars...so many that, if we were to try and count just the stars in our galaxy, counting one per second, it would take 2,500 years just to count them.

But Isaiah tells us that God has led them out one-by-one and called them each by name. Hebrews reminds us that one day all the heavens will perish...but God will remain. Scripture has proclaimed for thousands of years the awesomeness, the majesty, the enormity and the infinitude of our God. What Scripture has said, science is now beginning to show.

Let me take you on a visual journey that gives us just a hint of God's view...a picture of His perspective. Let's begin with a view 10 million light years away from our Milky Way subdivision of space...see it there, that dot in the middle of the screen. You come into one million light years away, get a good view, zoom in and you start to see it. You get in the mix of the stars of it... within 1,000 light years...then 100 light years from earth and you see nothing but stars. At 10 light years from earth, you see more stars and then finally, when you are one light year from earth, you see that tiny little dot in the middle...that's our sun.

You zoom in and the sun starts to become a little bit larger, our solar system begins to come into focus. Ten billion kilometers, one billion kilometers and you start to see the orbits of the planets and then at ten million kilometers, finally the speck that is earth begins to show. Here you can see the moon orbiting the earth, the earth being the dot in the middle. Finally, at only 100,000 kilometers, that familiar globe comes into view. Keep zooming in and you recognize the western hemisphere and the southeastern United States. You can keep zooming in all the way down to Florida, southwest Tallahassee, right to the lab that made this. You can even go in and see trees and lakes and zoom in on a tree. You can actually get close enough to look at a single oak leaf. Now it is incredible to realize that the God who created all that vastness, the God who spread it out, the God who measured all of the enormity, is the same God who knows the number of the hairs on your head.

You know, I thought about that this week and I wondered.... maybe that's why God has so many men go bald.... there is less hair to count that way! Of course it is probably more difficult when you think about a guy like Bryan Clark and how fast he loses his hair. God would have to have a spreadsheet! You know, He'd be like "Today he lost another one and this day he lost another one." Surely that can't be it.

But what is amazing is not only does God see and create the vastness of the heavens but God also sees the intricacies of detail. Zoom in and look at this leaf a little more closely. How about a little more closely? You can zoom in so close you can actually see cells on the surface of a single leaf. Keep going in and you see individual leaf cells...further in, the nucleus of a single leaf cell. Keep going, the chromatin in the leaf cell nucleus.... and here are individual strands of DNA and the building blocks of life, DNA nucleotide. You zoom in further and this is the outer electron cloud of a carbon atom. Isn't it interesting that the further in you go.... it begins to look like the further out you go? You zoom in further—the electron and the inner electron shell—and here is empty space between the inner shell and the nucleus. You bring it further and further and this is the carbon atom. Keep going in and you are face to face, looking right at a single proton and finally, you can zoom in so far that you are examining quarks...whatever they are!

You see, from the vastness of space to the most infinitely small, God sees and knows it all. He created it. He sustains it. All things were made by Him and for Him. He holds all things together. Our world is absolutely amazing and its amazingness is purely a simple expression of the true wonder of His Glory.

It is with all that in mind that I want us to look briefly today at Psalm 115. If you have a Bible, please open up to Psalm 115 and join me on this journey.

We will begin with verse 1:

**Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to Your name give glory because of Your lovingkindness, because of Your truth. Why should the nations say, "Where, now, is their God?" But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.** (Psalm 115:1-3, \*NASB)

Psalm 115 is perspective. It is a reminder that God is God and there is no other, nor should there ever be. Verse 2 rehearses the question that is so often asked by those of us who are slugging it out down here on earth. **"Why should the nations say, "Where now is their God?"**" It's the plea, "Don't abandon us!" It is the fear that if God doesn't show up, if He doesn't rescue us or meet us or help us in a way that makes sense to us and everyone else down here, then people will doubt and perhaps even mock His very existence. But verse 3 is a reminder that God is not shaken, He is not worried, He is never stressed--rather He is absolutely in control. Our God is in the Heavens. He does whatever He pleases. He is God. In the proper order of things, it is not for God to say, "How high?" when we say, "Jump." It is NOT to mistakenly assume that we are at the center and God is merely the supplier. It is NOT to think that God exists to solve our problems and meet our needs, wants and desires, but rather it is for us to clearly recognize and understand that He is God and we exist to bring Him glory. Our lives ought to be ordered around the reality of the wonder of who He is; instead of thinking He is to move heaven and earth for our comfort and our convenience.

Verse 1:

**Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to Your name give glory because of Your lovingkindness, because of Your truth.**

My friends, I have a disease and so do you. We have been infected by the virus of SELF and it stains and taints all that we do. We usually don't even like to think about it. But if we take moments of quiet reflection, it is disconcerting to realize just how much we live to please ourselves...just how much we seek to orchestrate the circumstances of life to meet our desires... even how much we view God and our relationship with God and how much of that is oriented around Him just being another tool in our vast arsenal of self-satisfying pursuits. I am saddened when I stop and realize just how much, even after 20 years of seeking to walk with God, my life is about trying to make myself happy, satisfied, comfortable and content. I really don't have any idea of just how selfish I am. Just ask my wife!

That is the disease you and I will battle until the day we die or until Christ comes again to set us free. At times we fight with valiant strength against the lure of self. At times, we don't even try and, in fact, at times we join the battle on the side of the enemy helping to make certain that selfishness wins the day. All the while we forget that it's not even supposed to be about us. All that we are, all that we see, all that is that we don't even know exists.... it is all about Him. He is awesome, He is majestic, He is infinite, He is beautiful and He is good. Even in the context of the reminder of our selfishness in Psalm 115 and the need to reorient our lives towards giving Him glory, we are reminded, in spite of who we are, He treats us with lovingkindness and He graciously reveals to us His truth. Those realities are also to point us in the right direction, towards giving Him glory with all that we are. **"Not to us, O LORD, not to us, But to Your name give glory."** Still the reality is that this issue of self-centeredness affects us even to the degree it affects us right here, at the time when we are supposedly coming together expressly for the purpose of worshipping Him.

Be honest with yourself.... how often do you come here hoping it is a good message—that it's not boring, but rather it's inspiring or motivating or moving or perhaps, even entertaining? How often

do you leave here focused on what you did or didn't get from the message? How about the singing? I like this song, this singer and these instruments. I don't like this or that. I really wished we would do this or that. It didn't sound that good. It sounded great! I really enjoyed the worship. I didn't care for the worship. It moved me. It touched me. It missed me.

Notice the running theme.... ME. So very often, even in our coming to worship, our focus is more about us than it is about Him. We evaluate, we assess, we sometimes even try and subtly help direct, often with the intent that we want a worship service that meets our needs and makes us happy or inspired or challenged or entertained or whatever it is that we want or think that we need. **“Not to us, O LORD, not to us, But to Your name give glory.”**

Perhaps today you came in, you sat down and looked up here and thought, “Where is everyone? Where are all the instruments and vocalists? Geez it must be summer!” Ha! Or maybe this thought slipped through your mind, “Wow, they didn't put much effort into this week!” Actually, this is intentional. I didn't want us to have a band or a choir or lots of lights, instruments or vocalists. Not that those things are bad. Those things can be absolutely wonderful! For one week, I wanted to remind us that it isn't about all that. Many of you are familiar with the song “The Heart of Worship” by Matt Redman. We have sung it here many times but I often wonder when we are singing that song, what are we thinking? You see, there is a part in that song where the words are, “I'm sorry Lord, for the thing I've made it” referring to worship. I wonder when we sing that...what are we saying? Do we even think about what we are saying and why would we say that in the first place?

Perhaps understanding the story behind the song would help a little bit. You see, Matt Redman was a worship leader in London. He was in a church that was growing, lots of people were coming, great things were happening. Neat worship services were taking place but it just seemed like something was wrong. It took awhile but finally the senior pastor put his finger on it. He realized that the people had gone from truly being worshipers to just being spectators. Even connoisseurs, judging what they liked and didn't like, rather than coming to bring an offering to the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. That pastor felt the need to take drastic action. He banned the band. To use the British term, they “sacked” Matt Redman—obviously, a very difficult time in Redman's life. But it was in that time that God used him to write “The Heart of Worship”. It's a song that is a reminder of what worship is supposed to be about, giving glory to God, for the wonder of who He is and thanksgiving for His amazing grace. It's also a confessional of what we sometimes turn worship into, a chance to make ourselves feel good or to be entertained or simply a tradition, a habit where we simply go through the motions. As Natalie comes back out and leads us, just a single vocalist and a simple piano, I would like us to worship together this morning.... seeking not to evaluate.... striving not to focus on ourselves or what we like or even how we feel.... but rather just endeavoring to thoughtfully consider who God is and seeking to give Him praise as our rightful and fitting response.

### **The Heart of Worship** - Matt Redman

When the music fades, all is stripped away,  
And I simply come; longing just to bring  
Something that's of worth  
That will bless Your heart.

I'll bring You more than a song,  
For a song in itself

Is not what You have required.  
You search much deeper within,  
Through the way things appear;  
You're looking into my heart.

I'm coming back to the heart of worship,  
And it's all about You, all about You, Jesus.  
I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing I've made it,  
When it's all about You, all about You, Jesus.

King of endless worth, no one could express  
How much You deserve.  
Though I'm weak and poor,  
All I have is Yours, ev'ry single breath.

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### **There Is None Like You** - Lenny LeBlanc

There is none like You.  
No one else can touch  
My heart like You do;  
I could search  
For all eternity long and find  
There is none like You.

Your mercy flows  
Like a river wide  
And healing comes  
From Your hands;  
Suffering children  
Are safe in Your arms  
There is none like You.

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That thought is truth. There is none like Him. We could search for all of eternity and never, never find anything that compares to the wonder and the glory of our God. Yet, in spite of that truth, we are so prone to look for others.

Verse 4:

**Their idols are silver and gold, the work of man's hands. 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. Those who make them will become like them, everyone who trusts in them. (vs. 4-8)**

Verses 4-8 of Psalm 115 are a striking summary of the impotence of false gods. They are made of metal or stone by the hands of men. They have mouths but no words, eyes but no sight, ears but no hearing, noses but no smelling, hands but no feeling, feet but no walking! They are in a word...worthless. They are worthless because they are not living, but dead. Verse 8 reminds us that those who make them will become like them. If we put our trust in a cold, hard, lifeless, dead god, then we are going to be cold, hard, lifeless, dead people; because dead gods cannot produce life.

This is so obvious, so evident when I go to India and to Asia. It is striking to see the idols everywhere. There are so many different dead gods. Look at a few of them with me this morning: Brahma, Krishna, Durga, Ganesh, Lakshmi, Vishnu, and 33 million others. There is a stone or a metal god seemingly on every corner and apparently, if you want more from god, then you need to make a bigger god. This is a picture of an idol in Delhi of the destroyer god Shiva. You can't really get the grasp of how big it is until you look close at the devotee at its feet... then the face of this dead false god. You know, for enlightened people like us here in America, it seems totally absurd! Why, we in America would never bow down and worship man-made objects and human fantasies. Right? You know, we may have made our idols a bit more sophisticated, but they are just as prevalent here.

After all, what are the things we put our trust in? What are the things that we look to for fulfillment, for happiness, for joy, for satisfaction, for life? Just change the names and the picture really isn't all that different: success, prestige, pleasure, fame, comfort, power and so many others. If we want more, we pursue more, we earn more, we buy more, we play more, we eat more, we pursue sensuality more and we conquer more. So often the little "gods" that we trust in are merely a means of feeding the voracious appetite of the really big "god" that we serve.

The truth is.... it's not just all those people out there.... it's me.... it's you. So, how do we know what it is that we wrongly worship? Well.... again.... it's a question of where we place our trust.

Look again at verse 8:

**Those who make them will become like them, everyone who trusts in them. 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. You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD; He is their help and their shield. 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. May the LORD give you increase, you and your children. May you be blessed of the LORD, maker of heaven and earth.** (vs. 8-15)

The Psalmist exhorts the people to trust in God as he seeks to remind the people of the goodness of God. God has been and will be good to those that worship Him alone. He is the one true God. He is the maker of Heaven and Earth and He is good. He is worthy of our trust. He is altogether unlike—opposite of—those many false gods. But our trust is often **in** other things because our eyes are often **on** other things. If you want to know what you trust in.... if you want to know what your god is.... simply answer these questions: What is it that captivates my heart the most? What is it that grabs and holds my attention most often and most intensely? What is it that occupies and fills my mind? What becomes my pursuit? What captivates me the most? Money? Status? Shopping? Sensuality? Adventure? Comfort? Security? A relationship? Or is your heart's greatest longing for this amazing, enormous, unbelievably good God. You see, even good things can become gods when they capture first place in our heart.

I want to be captivated by the God who merely spoke and all the vastness and immensity that is, came into being. I want to be captivated by the God who wasn't too busy with all of that to see the longing in my broken and hurting heart, who cares so much for me that He wants me to be with Him forever, when even the cosmos will pass away. He became a man and let people beat Him and mock Him and spit upon Him and kill Him just to make that possible. Why do I let my heart be consumed with so much less?

This morning, as the ushers come to receive our morning offering, I want us to sing a song together that is a prayer—it's a prayer for God to captivate us; not only that our giving would be an offering but that our song would be as well. And even more, that our lives... moment by moment... day by day... would be lived in pursuit of Him, His heart, His love, His glory. Let's pray and then let's sing this song as a prayer for that very end.

*Jesus, you know my heart, you see it completely. You know it would be anything but untruth for me to act as though I am not often captivated by many other things. Lord, I just confess to you that often I am not most captivated by You and Your heart and Your wonder and Your majesty. God, I want to be. Lord, we want to be, we beg you, we beseech you God! Captivate our hearts, draw us to Yourself. Give us a burning hunger and a passion to know You. Lord, the truth is that we often place our trust in other things because our eyes are on other things. God, cause us to slow down, to stop and spend time with You, to seek Your face, to see the wonder and glory of who You are, to worship You, to read Your Word, to cause us to seek You that we might be captivated by You. As we see you in Your majesty, that is exactly what will take place. God, I pray that for myself. God, I pray that for the people in this room and the people in the Upper Room. I pray that for the people of our church. I pray that for the believers of our city.*

*Lord, this week we want to pray for New Covenant Church. Lord, it's just amazing how Pastor Tim Johnson's request was just that very thing, that their church would be a place that would inspire, train and empower people to live their lives for Christ and Christ alone; that the people would be captivated and involved in things much larger than just themselves. God, we pray that for our brothers and sisters at New Covenant. God, I think of our dear friends Jim and Kris Bell and their kids and family on the other side of the earth in China with their team and starting to seek you among those unreached people. God, as they go about that very difficult task, I pray You will captivate their hearts. I pray they wouldn't just do the work, I pray they would abide with You. I pray even this week You would meet them in a meaningful way that would draw their hearts close to Yourself. Lord, we turn on the TV and we are quickly reminded of what is going on in the Middle East and the unsettledness that is there. Lord, the ultimate solution, our ultimate prayer, God, we pray that Israel would be drawn back to you. We pray their eyes would be on their God, that they'd be captivated by You and that they would be open to see that Jesus is their Messiah, that there is a hope greater than all the things of this world. Lord, from our own heart, all the way around the world this is our prayer. What we desire is that You would be captivating people and that You would be revealing Your glory, showing who You really are. As we give our offering this morning, as we sing this song, may we sing it as a prayer, may we give out of a heart of love for you and may we live our lives abiding with you in such a way that You are the thing that captivates our hearts. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

We are just beginning to see glimpses of the amazing world of the heavens. What we see causes us to stare in awe at the wonder of our God. Whether we ever see them or not, every day they give glory to His name. Here we are on this tiniest of little specks which would be absolutely imperceptible were we not living on it. But, God has placed us here and He has given us a choice. We are not robots. We are not automatons—we're free.

Verse 16:

**The heavens are the heavens of the LORD, but the earth He has given to the sons of men. 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. Praise the LORD!**

(vs. 16-18)

We are free. We have a choice. We can have this little speck and live for it, live for us, pursuing our goals, our comfort, our pleasure, our fame, our glory. We can spend our days being captivated by, trusting in and bowing down to dead gods who make false promises or we can give our hearts and lives to knowing and pursuing Christ. The Psalmist speaks of there being no praise from the grave, so whether we are actually dead spiritually and physically or simply living like it and choosing to live for the false gods of earth, our lives will be a waste because we will miss the very point of our existence...giving glory to the one true God.

Psalm 115 begins by reminding us that glory is not for us...the focus of life should not be toward us. But what about us?

Verse 18 sums it up:

**But as for us, we will bless the LORD from this time forth and forever. Praise the LORD!**

Just listen as Natalie sings and align your heart to the message of this psalm through the words of this song.

**As For Us** - Randy Ray

Not to me, O Lord, not to me  
But to You give glory and fame  
You're the King, I am Your servant  
Glorify Your name.

Not to us, O Lord, not to us  
But to You give glory and fame  
You're the King we are Your servants  
Glorify Your name.

I love You Lord, I trust You Lord  
You're my help and shield  
I love You Lord, I trust You Lord  
You're my help and shield.

Not to us, O Lord, not to us  
But to You give glory and fame  
You're the King, we are Your servants  
Glorify Your name.

Not to us, O Lord, not to us  
But to You give glory and fame  
You're the King, we are Your servants  
Glorify Your name.

You're the King, we are Your servants  
Glorify Your name.

Glorify Your name.

As for us, O Lord, as for us  
We will sing our song we'll proclaim  
You're the King, King of kings  
Glorify Your name.

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Stop and realize how truly awesome, enormous and wondrous God is and how truly small, petty and self-serving we are. It can be overwhelming, but that's what makes God all the more amazing. That's what makes praising Him all the more attractive, because in spite of who He is and in spite of who we are, He loves us with an everlasting love. In spite of the immensity and the unspeakable vastness of His universe, He is right here right now. He knows every need, desire and burden on your heart and on mine. He wants us so badly. He died to make us His own.

This morning, as we reflect on His majesty, we want to conclude by reflecting on His humility and His love. We want to join together in the Lord's Supper as a time to remember and reflect on the fact that, although He is altogether unlike us, He is for us. He died to pay for our sins and He rose to give us new life. We are here to worship Him.

*Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.*

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