

Who do We Trust?

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[0 : 00] And thanks so much for reading, Ben. And let me add my welcome to that of Graham's. My name's Archie. And if you hadn't already worked that out, I'm the pastor in training here. And it's great to be here this morning.

And do have that passage open in front of you. I know I say this all the time, but it's just so helpful. So if you've got a Bible in front of you, just open it to Psalm 115. And there are Bibles kind of on the pews around you.

You'll also be able to get it on your phone. If you do have it on your phone, put your phone on airplane mode. We all know what we're like. And if you get a message, you'll just reply to it, won't you? Certainly, that's what I would do. But fine to have it on your phone.

And let me get a show of hands as we start. Put your hand up if you trust politicians. Yeah, I thought so. Generally speaking, as a profession, they're just not the sort of people that we trust, are they? Apparently, we just don't trust them. They consistently top the list in the UK of the professions that we just don't trust. And let's be honest, we've got good reason not to trust them. Katie, my wife, often reminds me that it's much better to under-promise and over-deliver than to over-promise and under-deliver.

[1 : 09] And I guess that's why we've learned not to trust politicians. Just very often, they make promises that they can't deliver on. And trust is important to us, isn't it? It's true with politicians, but maybe you know it just much more personally.

If you've ever trusted someone and been let down by them, that sort of betrayal is one of the most horrible feelings that I think we can experience, really. It can be horrible.

And on the other side of that coin, it's wonderful, isn't it, to be able to trust those that we love and those that love us most. Because trust is right at the heart of any healthy relationship.

Trust is just very important to us. And our psalm this morning gets us asking that question, what do we trust? Not just what politicians do we trust to make good on their promises, but what, or I guess rather, who do we trust when life gets tough?

So we've just sung about the one who is the Lord of all, even in the storms of life. When you're no longer able to steer the ship yourself, who are you going to trust to the wheelhouse?

[2 : 24] And importantly, ultimately, not just in this life, but what do we think happens when we die? And who do we trust with the answer to that question?

Who do we trust with our eternities? We're in a section of the psalms that Graham has just told us. It's often called the Egyptian Hallel. Hallel, you know that word. You might not think you know that word, but you do know that word. It's a familiar word. Hallel, hallelujah, means praise Yahweh, praise God.

And these psalms from 113 to 118, we've seen a couple of them over the last two weeks. They are praising Hallel, praising God for his rescue of ancient Israel out of slavery in Egypt.

And so they're just often known as the Egyptian Hallel, the Egyptian praise. And I think it's quite hard to say exactly when or for who this psalm was written, the one that we've just read together.

[3 : 26] But I think verse two gives us a little bit of a clue. So have a look at verse two with me. What does it say? Why should the nations say, where is their God?

We can imagine, I think, that this psalm is probably written at a time where the nations surrounding Israel are questioning the existence, perhaps the potency and the goodness, of Israel's God.

Now, if I'm honest, I think that could be at any time in ancient Israel's history. But a time, I think, perhaps of national crisis, a time where Israel are particularly struggling.

It does not look as though their God is with them. I wonder, I suppose it could be in the aftermath of the Assyrian or Babylonian invasions, where both Israel, the northern kingdom, Judah, the southern

kingdom, they were both conquered, taken into exile.

And then when they returned from that exile, we read in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, they've returned and they've begun rebuilding the temple. But the temple is just very unimpressive compared to what was there before they were taken into exile.

[4 : 34] And we read in those books that the nations around them mocked them for it. It might not be that, but maybe that is the context. Whatever the context is, the nations around them are looking on at Israel and asking, where is your God?

He doesn't look so powerful now. And maybe that sounds familiar. It's true, isn't it? That the world around us is always calling into question the existence, the potency, and the goodness of our God. I mean, even just think about over the last few years, how little God has been in the conversation. We've faced some pretty big things with COVID and various wars, climate change, and nowhere. Flick through any newspaper, the Scotsman, the Times, the Week, watch Sky News in the morning, whatever it is, nowhere you will find the suggestion that God has anything to do with any of those things.

Much less would you see anywhere claims that he might be the solution. And I think that really reflects how people think about God in Scotland today. In other words, they just don't really think about him at all.

[5 : 39] He probably doesn't exist. And even if he does, he must surely be impotent, or evil, or both. And we certainly wouldn't trust him.

You know, just last week, I was sat with a friend whose mum died last year. And his dad had a stroke just 10 days ago. And he's reached a point in life where he's asking some big questions. We had some fascinating conversations about the gospel and about God's word and his purposes. And in many ways, it was a really encouraging conversation to me. But these conversations, they're often very similar.

I don't know if you find this, but people are genuinely interested. They see that the gospel, the good news of Christianity, does make sense. Most of my friends would even know that they're sinful in some way.

They long for eternal life. But then it's also really discouraging because for them, for a lot of my friends, what their unbelief boils down to, often as they look at the world that we live in, the mess, the injustice, the pain in their own lives, they're asking, where is your God in this?

[6 : 52] For some of them, they've probably convinced themselves that that's the case, maybe just to justify the way that they're living, to avoid confronting their sin, though I think they know that it's there. But however it is that they've reached that position in their thinking, just like the nations in this psalm, they see a messy world, they see the faith of Christians, they see my faith, and they're asking, where's your God in all of this?

Maybe you're here this morning, and maybe you're there too. Maybe you have similar questions about where God is in all of this mess. Well, stay tuned this morning, because let me tell you, this God, the God that we believe in, he is utterly trustworthy.

And this psalm would tell us that it's utterly foolish to put your trust anywhere else. But where is this God? Well, the psalmist answers that question immediately. Have a look at verse three.

Our God is in the heavens. He does all that pleases him. And this God, Israel's God, the God of the universe, is just absolutely in control.

He's in heaven. That's not some spiritual other world, but in the heavens. It just means the skies. Where is he? He fills the galaxy. He inhabits the universe.

[8 : 10] And notice he does all that he pleases. Not some of what he pleases. Not what he pleases for some or in some circumstances. No, God does all that he pleases.

He is absolutely in control. He was in control when he rescued his people from slavery in Egypt, when he spared him from his wrath at the Passover, as we'll hear about a little bit later.

He was in control in the context of this psalm. Whatever it was that Israel faced as they were mocked by the nations around them, their God was in control.

And he is in control today. Everything going on in the news. I spent just two minutes on the BBC website this week. I tried to avoid it as best I can.

But just two minutes. Headlines about war, about people stuck in hospitals, about economic turmoil, about assaults and abuse. In all of the mess out there and in all of the mess in here, in my sinful heart, though the world does not recognize him, our God has got this whole thing under control.

[9 : 17] Would we trust him in that? And it is absolutely essential that we do because, and this is really the first big thing that I want us to see in this psalm this morning, because if we trust in man-made idols, this psalm says that we will become dead like them.

If we trust in man-made idols, we will become dead like them. Let me read from verse four. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands.

They have mouths, but cannot or do not speak. Eyes, but cannot see. They have ears, but cannot hear. Noses, but cannot smell. They have hands, but cannot feel.

Feet, but cannot walk. And they do not make a sound in their throats. Do you see the irony here? The Israelites' God, who has rescued them out of slavery, he has spoken to them.

He's given them his perfect commandments, helping them to live wisely in the world. The nations around them, those nations that mock their God, well, the irony is they worship these idols, created trinkets, preciously made.

[10 : 33] Yes, they're made from silver and gold. But of course, as these verses, yes, those idols are silent. They cannot speak like the God of the universe does. They're blind.

They're deaf. They cannot smell or feel or walk. Picture with me Andy's bedroom. Andy from Toy Story, if you know the scene, take yourself to his bedroom.

As he leaves the room, what happens? The toys, they come to life, don't they? They talk to one another. They even plot together.

Those toys, they are alive. They are precisely the opposite of what this psalmist describes. What's the psalmist saying? These idols, they're utterly inanimate.

They are not alive. These idols are dead. And to our modern sensibilities, of course they are. We know that Toy Story is fantastical. And actually, most people today, I think, would agree.

[11 : 33] Like, maybe even if you don't believe in the God of this psalm, you'd probably still say, wouldn't you, that inanimate objects can't actually be gods. They have no real agency or power in our world.

But of course, there are millions who worship idols exactly like these in our world today. Virtually every major religion takes man-made things and puts them in a temple or in a church and calls them holy.

But there's more to it than that because increasingly, I think, the worldview around us isn't simply atheistic. It doesn't just rely on man-made idols, but it is spiritualistic and superstitious.

This is everywhere. Let me just give you a couple of examples. I was speaking to a friend at the rugby club this week and he was talking about manifesting. I don't know if you've come across this trend that if you focus your thoughts on your goal, on a desired outcome, just focusing on it and trying to bring it into being.

He was talking about wanting to put on a bit of weight and manifesting that as though tapping into some stream of consciousness would make that happen for him. Maybe that kind of half-supernatural kind of belief is familiar to you.

[12 : 49] I think it's everywhere at the moment. It might be less spiritual and more superstitious. Katie and I are going on holiday in September and, you know, flights are way cheaper on the 11th of September than they are on any other day of the year.

Apparently, they're also cheaper on Friday the 13th. People just are way more superstitious than I think we realise. And maybe if you're honest, you can be a bit like that too.

Even just in subtle ways, superstitious, trusting in your own man-made rituals and idols to get you through life. I think more than that, outside of the explicitly supernatural, isn't it just very normal to place our ultimate trust in the material?

Perhaps that's most obvious with our money. I know I sometimes do that. Very often we think, don't we, that if we just had enough money, then all our worries and problems would disappear.

And if we're doing alright with money, how easy it is to trust that in place of trusting our God. That whatever our idols and superstitions, whatever it is that we're trusting to get us through life, they might offer us comfort in the moment.

[14 : 01] They might be genuinely helpful for a time. But the hope that they give always fades.

Ultimately, and maybe you've experienced this yourself, they all have the capacity to let us down in the end.

Whether we run out of money or our superstitions just don't work out or the friends and family members that we had trusted let us down in some way or another.

All of these things can let us down, prove themselves to be hollow and ultimately do more harm for us than good. Wherever we're trusting things other than this God, this God who does not change, who is a solid rock, wherever we're trusting other things, this psalmist says we've got to see those things are not really alive.

They don't have real agency. They do not speak today. And ultimately, they cannot save us because they are dead or they are dying.

And did you see in verse 8 where the psalmist is going here? It says, those who make them become like them and so do all who trust in them.

[15:18] In other words, those who make and trust in idols will die. See that these idols are totally inanimate, they're impotent, they're dead. And I actually think this is supposed to be comfort for the Israelites because the psalmist says those nations around you, they might look powerful and you might be facing troubling times.

Maybe your temple project just doesn't look that impressive. Times that cause those people to mock your God but ultimately those people are going to become like their idols. Dead.

And us too, if we trust in man-made idols, will become dead like them. And now of course we will all die and I hope that's not news to you but you will one day die.

And so whatever it is that we're trusting in or in whatever it is that we face in life, whether we're unwell or we're caring for someone who's unwell or we're looking for a new job or navigating a tricky relationship, whether it's at home or at work or at school, wherever we are and those around us are calling God into question, whatever it is that we trust through that, we have to say it's really just putting off the inevitable, isn't it?

Because though they might help us steer the course, at the end of it all, we will all die. We will all become like the idols that we've worshipped. And yet, in all this, there is the glorious hope of the Christian gospel that if we trust in the living God, we will live forever.

[16:52] That's the second big thing in our psalm this morning. If we trust in the living God, we will live forever. Do you notice the repeated refrains in verses 9 to 11?

As the psalmist say, trust in the Lord. He is their help and shield. In those verses, it is all of Israel, the house of Aaron, that's the kind of priestly family, those who fear the Lord, that I think is outsiders welcomed in.

The psalmist says, trust him. Trust him because he's been faithful in your history as a nation and he will be faithful forever. For the readers of this psalm and the other psalms around it, singing these psalms and remembering the exodus, the rescue from slavery, remembering the Passover, the deliverance from God's wrath and his justice, they're remembering that God has proved himself to be faithful, faithful to his promises and he will be faithful forever into eternity.

Have a look at verse 12. The Lord has remembered us. He will bless us. Again, it's Israel, Aaron's house and all who fear the Lord, both the small and the great.

This God, the God who we've seen is in total control. He wants to bless his people. I love that little detail that it's the small and the great. God's blessing is for you, the least and the greatest, the poor and the rich, the servant and the king.

[18:26] He has remembered them all and he will bless them all. But just imagine how difficult that must have been for these people. incredibly difficult to see in the context as God's people have these nations mocking them.

The glory of the Jerusalem temple once a genuine wonder, now nothing compared to the temples of the great empires around them. Even as it's being rebuilt, it's unimpressive.

They don't look much blessed. But God's promises are sure and he will bless those who trust in him. and that remains true today.

God has promised to bless you. Do you believe that? And would you trust him from the smallest to the greatest, the least to the most, whoever you are, however you have been made to feel about yourself, would you trust this God and receive his blessing on your life?

Now what exactly does that mean to trust in him and he will bless us? What are we saying? Are we saying that we're blessed according to a measure of our trust? Materially blessed?

[19:40] There are lots of people who would speak that sort of way, claiming that with enough trust in God we can kind of claim any blessing as our own. What blessing would you like today? Are you single?

Would you like a husband or a wife? Would you like some money for that project, some physical healing? And look, God does of course give such good things to his people in his will but not because one trusts him more than another.

That's not how blessing works. God is not a vending machine. It's not a case of I do my bit, I trust God and he does his bit, he blesses me accordingly.

Instead, it is all according to his grace. All the good things that we get in life, all of the ways that we have been blessed by him. It's not because we deserve them in any way at all but would we trust that any blessing we have received, any blessing that we will receive comes from him and not from dead idols and crucially to trust that God's blessing his people won't always look like what the world calls blessing.

Remember the context here is the nations look and mock. Clearly it didn't look like worldly blessing. Whatever was going on was not impressive.

[21 : 07] It won't always look impressive. In fact, it might look very unimpressive. Have a look at verses 14 and 15 for an example of how God's blessing might work.

It says, may the Lord cause you to flourish or give you increase. You and your children, may you be blessed by the Lord who made heaven and earth. You know, the idols of the surrounding, the nations surrounding Israel were often attributed with fertility and prosperity, just two of the most important things in the ancient world.

That's what the people foolishly trusted in idols for. But one of the great promises of Israel's scripture was that God's people would be the ones who would be fruitful and who would multiply. Just fundamental to the Bible is that those things are blessings from God. It comes right at the beginning with Adam as a kind of global promise. And then it's repeated at various points to the leaders of God's people as a particular promise to Israel.

And it's a promise that in some ways has already been fulfilled by the time of this psalm. The Israelite nation had grown. It had occupied the promised land. But of course here it seems as though they're in a national crisis.

[22 : 23] And so God says to them, you may be decimated now. It may look as though your God has deserted you. The nations may mock, but still I am your God and I promise that those who are left will once again be fruitful and multiply.

And God doesn't over promise and under deliver. He delivers on his promises. And what do we make of that promise today? That God's people would be fruitful?

That they would multiply? I'll be honest, from where I'm standing, church doesn't always feel all that fruitful. I mean, just look around, we're a pretty unimpressive bunch, aren't we?

Especially on a kind of quiet summer Sunday like this. It just doesn't feel like we're multiplying all that quickly. Certainly across Scotland, that's the headline, isn't it?

Christianity is dying. This building is testament to that. I mean, just look up at this false ceiling. Most of you probably know that hides a balcony, a constant reminder that at one point this building had a capacity for many hundreds of people.

[23 : 36] What do we make of God's promise that his people would be fruitful and multiply? Well, it might be hard to see. It might be really hard to see it here in Scotland at the moment, but God's church continues to grow.

Honestly, I think the church decline narrative here is massively overstated. I think the pews have been emptying of people who never really believed in the first place. And we can talk about that afterwards if you like, but much more than that, I've been listening to this brilliant podcast recently. It's called GLO. A review of it is in the monthly newsletter if you want to read more about it. But it exists to tell stories of how the church is growing all over the world.

As they put it, they say this, when we look at the global church, when we see that the gospel of Jesus Christ is not losing steam, it is in fact flourishing in new and amazing ways, God is still at work.

It may be very hard to see it sometimes, but God does not break his promises. There are more Christians alive today than there ever have been in the history of this planet.

[24 : 52] God does not break his promises. His church is being fruitful, it is multiplying, and it will continue to do so. For the God who is in control is behind it, and his gospel is very good.

His promise is that if we trust in him and the living God, then we too will live forever. That is good news. And it's good news that has real power.

Here's why. You see back in verses 4 to 7, we saw that the idols are dead, that they have no life in them. In verse 8, we saw that all who trust in them will follow them to the grave.

I take it that is to the eternal grave. And why is that true? Well, it's true because an idol who is not alive cannot die to save. An idol who is not alive cannot die to save, and that's what we need.

Here's why. Our human instinct, which leads us to trust anything other than the living God, in other words, our rebellion against him, our sin, demands a price.

[25 : 58] It demands death. It's why those who turn away from him in this psalm face death. But we can point to a victorious, living saviour, a God who became man, who joined us in our suffering, who really encountered the crisis that all of humanity faces, who witnessed and was tempted by our rebellion against God, but who, having lived a perfect life, took the punishment for that rebellion in our place, who, unlike already dead idols, he really could die for us, and he did.

But he didn't stay dead. He really did rise again. In John chapter 20, we read the wonderful story of Thomas. Why don't I just read it for us?

You don't need to turn there, but in John chapter 20, it says this. Now Thomas, also known as Didymus, one of the twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came.

Jesus has risen from the grave, he's appeared to all the other disciples. Thomas wasn't there. So the other disciples told him, we have seen the Lord. But he said to them, unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were and put my hand into his side, I will not believe. A week later, his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas this time was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, peace be with you.

[27 : 37] And he said to Thomas, put your finger here, see my hands, reach out your hand and put it in my side, stop doubting and believe. Thomas said, my Lord and my God.

Then Jesus told him, because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. It's one of my favourite scenes in all of the Gospels, that Thomas' encounter with the risen Jesus.

As Thomas felt the nail marks in his hands, as he put his hand in the wound in Jesus' side, this isn't a ghost story. Jesus is alive.

And he's alive today. He sits at the right hand of the Father, reigning in heaven. Our God is alive. Would we trust him? For anyone who trusts in the living God, they will live forever.

Just notice then finally as we finish how God's people are called to respond to this good news. In verses 16 to 18. How do God's people respond?

[29 : 06] They respond with Hallel, in praise. Do you notice these verses contain a bit of a summary of the psalm? I don't know if you noticed that. Where is God? He's in the heavens, which are his.

Where is man? On earth, which is his. But those who trust in things of the earth will die. And in their death they will not praise him. But we, God's people, those who trust in him, we will bless him, we will praise him.

Do you notice the implication there is that if we trust in him, we will live forever and so we can praise him from this time forth and forevermore. We noted last week that the Israelites sang this set of psalms as they celebrated their rescue out of slavery in Egypt.

And every year at the festival of Passover they celebrated that rescue. And in particular they celebrated the moment where God's judgment passed over the homes of those who were faithful. As each faithful family sacrificed a lamb that was God's sign to them, a sign of their faithfulness so that his judgment would pass over them and fall instead on the Egyptians and those who had not trusted in him.

[30 : 20] In that story God promised to rescue them and he delivered on that promise. And you know we can read and sing these psalms today knowing that Jesus came to be the once and for all time sacrificial lamb.

That for us God has made a way, he has promised that for those who trust in him, those who are faithful to him, that the judgment of God might pass over them and God delivers on his promises.

If you're here this morning and you do not trust him, maybe you're one of those who mocks, who laughs at God's people. Where is your God? And I suspect if you're here this morning you might be a bit more respectful than that.

And yet if you're honest you can't help but agree. God just doesn't seem all that powerful in the mess of this world. If that's you, let me ask you, who or what do you trust?

Who do you trust to steer the ship in the storms of this mess? As life gets tough, where do you turn? And who do you trust to see you through the other side?

[31 : 31] can the things that you trust make a real difference? Do they have the capacity to let you down? And ultimately with your eternal fate to your eternal position before God, can those things that you trust, can they really speak?

Can they really save? Do they really live? And for the Christian, if you do trust like that, how will you respond to your God this morning?

The God who is in absolute control, the God who is alive, this living God who has promised to rescue you, this living God who has rescued you in Jesus, he is far more trustworthy than any man-made thing, certainly more trustworthy than any of our politicians.

He never breaks his promises. So will you trust him this morning? Will you see his blessing on your life and on his church?

And will we praise him together? Let me pray. Heavenly Father, I thank you so much that you are a God who speaks today, that we can come to your word as we have just done and hear from you.

[32 : 56] Lord, I thank you so much for Jesus. I thank you that he came to save us, that he is alive, that he died and that he's alive again.

Lord, I pray that you would, by your Holy Spirit, help us to trust you this morning and that you would draw out our praises for you, for your glory, name and in Jesus' name.

Amen.