

# Exposition on Psalm 115

by St. Augustine

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*St. Augustine emphasizes the importance of God's mercy and the condemnation of idol worship, highlighting the difference between God and idols, and the significance of the house of Israel's hope in God.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 113:1-114, Matthew 24:30, Romans 1:25, Romans 4:5, Romans 8:24

**Topics:** "Gods Mercy", "Divine Glory"

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## Description

St. Augustine preaches about the importance of not seeking glory for ourselves but giving praise to the Lord, emphasizing that God's grace is given out of mercy, not based on our works. He highlights the inseparable qualities of loving mercy and truth in Scripture, pointing to the ultimate display of God's mercy and truth in the future. Augustine reflects on the omnipotence of God, who is above all earthly and heavenly bodies, and does not need His creations to support Him.

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## Transcript

1. Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Your Name give the praise Psalm 113:1. For that grace of the water that gushed from the rock (now that rock was Christ 1 Corinthians 10:4), was not given on the score of works that had gone before, but of His mercy that justifies the ungodly. Romans 4:5 For Christ died for sinners, that men might not seek any glory of their own, but in the Lord's Name.

2. For Your loving mercy, and for Your truth's sake Psalm 113:2. Observe how often these two qualities, loving mercy and truth, are joined together in the holy Scriptures. For in His loving mercy He called sinners, and in His truth He judges those who when called refused to come. That the heathen may not say, Where is now their God? For at the last, His loving mercy and truth will shine forth, when the sign of the Son of man shall appear in heaven, and then shall all tribes of the earth cry woe; Matthew 24:30 nor shall they then say, Where is their God? when He is no longer preached unto them to be believed in, but displayed before them to be trembled at.

3. As for our God, He is in heaven above Psalm 113:3. Not in heaven, where they see the sun and moon, works of God which they adore, but in heaven above, which overpasses all heavenly and earthly bodies. Nor is our God in heaven in such a sense, as to dread a fall that should deprive Him of His throne, if heaven were withdrawn from under Him. In heaven and earth He has made whatsoever pleased Him. Nor does He stand in need of His own works, as if He had place in them where He might abide; but endures in His own eternity, wherein He abides and has done whatsoever pleased Him, both in heaven and earth; for they did not support Him, as a condition of their being created by Him: since, unless they had been

created, they could not have supported Him. Therefore, in whatsoever He Himself dwells, He, so to speak, contains this as in need of Himself, He is not contained by this as if He needed it. Or it may be thus understood: In heaven and in earth He has done whatsoever pleased Him, whether among the higher or the lower orders of His people, He has made His grace His free gift, that no man may boast in the merits of his own works....

4. Their idols, he says, are silver and gold, even the work of men's hands Psalm 113:4. That is, although we cannot display our God to your carnal eyes, whom you ought to recognise through his works; yet be not seduced by your vain pretences, because ye can point with the finger to, the objects of your worship. For it were much worthier for you not to have what to point to, than that your hearts' blindness should be displayed in what is exhibited to these eyes by you: for what do ye exhibit, save gold and silver? They have indeed both bronze, and wood, and earthenware idols, and of different materials of this description; but the Holy Spirit preferred mentioning the more precious material, because when every man has blushed for that which he sets more by, he is much more easily turned away from the worship of meaner objects. For it is said in another passage of Scripture concerning the worshippers of images, Saying to a stock, You are my father; and to a stone, You have brought me forth. Jeremiah 2:27 But lest that man who speaks thus not to a stone or stock, but to gold and silver, seem wiser to himself; let him look this way, let him turn hitherwards the ear of his heart: The idols of the Gentiles are gold and silver. Nothing mean and contemptible is here mentioned: and indeed to that mind which is not earth, both gold and silver is earth, but more beautiful and brilliant, more solid and firm. Employ not then the hands of men, to create a false Deity out of that metal which a true God has created; nay, a false man, whom you may worship for a true God....

5. For they have mouths, and speak not: eyes have they, and see not Psalm 113:5. They have ears, and hear not: noses have they, and smell not Psalm 113:6. They have hands, and handle not; feet have they, and walk not; neither cry they through their throat Psalm 113:7. Even their artist therefore surpasses them, since he had the faculty of moulding them by the motion and functions of his limbs: though you would be ashamed to worship that artist. Even you surpass them, though you have not made these things, since you do what they cannot do. Even a beast does excel them; for unto this it is added, neither cry they through their throat. For after he had said above, they have mouths, and speak not; what need was there, after he had enumerated the limbs from head to feet, to repeat what he had said of their crying through their throat; unless, I suppose, because we perceive that what he mentioned of the other members, was common to men and beasts? For they see, and hear, and smell, and walk, and some, apes for instance, handle with hands. But what he had said of the mouth, is peculiar to men: since beasts do not speak. But that no one might refer what has been said to the works of human members alone, and prefer men only to the gods of the heathen; after all this he added these words, neither cry they through their throat: which again is common to men and cattle....How much better then do mice and serpents, and other animals of like sort, judge of the idols of the heathen, so to speak, for they regard not the human figure in them when they see not the human life. For this reason they usually build nests in them, and unless they are deterred by human movements, they seek for themselves no safer habitations. A man then moves himself, that he may frighten away a living beast from his own god; and yet worships that god who cannot move himself, as if he were powerful, from whom he drove away one better than the object of his worship....Even the dead surpasses a deity who neither lives nor has lived....

6. But they seem to themselves to have a purer religion, who say, I neither worship an idol, nor a devil; but in the bodily image I behold an emblem of that which I am bound to worship....They presume to reply, that

they worship not the bodies themselves, but the deities which preside over the government of them. One sentence of the Apostle, therefore, testifies to their punishment and condemnation; Who, he says, have changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Romans 1:25 For in the former part of this sentence he condemned idols; in the latter, the account they give of their idols: for by designating images wrought by an artificer by the names of the works of God's creation, they change the truth of God into a lie; while, by considering these works themselves as deities, and worshipping them as such, they serve the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever....

7. But, it will be said, we also have very many instruments and vessels made of materials or metal of this description for the purpose of celebrating the Sacraments, which being consecrated by these ministrations are called holy, in honour of Him who is thus worshipped for our salvation: and what indeed are these very instruments or vessels, but the work of men's hands? But have they mouth, and yet speak not? Have they eyes, and see not? Do we pray unto them, because through them we pray to God? This is the chief cause of this insane profanity, that the figure resembling the living person, which induces men to worship it, has more influence in the minds of these miserable persons, than the evident fact that it is not living, so that it ought to be despised by the living.

8. The result that ensues is that described in the next verse: They that make them are like them, and so are all such as put their trust in them Psalm 113:8. Let them therefore see with open eyes, and worship with shut and dead understandings, idols that neither see nor live. But the house of Israel has hoped in the Lord Psalm 113:9. For hope that is seen is not hope; for what a man sees, why does he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it. Romans 8:24-25 But that this patience may endure to the end, He is their helper and defender. Do perhaps spiritual persons (by whom carnal minds are built up in the spirit of meekness, Galatians 6:1 because they pray as higher for lower minds) already see, and is that already to them reality which to the lower is hope? It is not so. For even the house of Aaron has hope in the Lord Psalm 113:10. Therefore, that they also may stretch forward perseveringly towards those things which are before them, and may run perseveringly, until they may apprehend that for which they are apprehended, Philippians 3:12-14 and may know even as they are known, 1 Corinthians 13:12 He is their helper and defender. For both fear the Lord, and have hoped in the Lord: He is their helper and defender Psalm 113:11.

9. For we do not by our deservings prevent the mercy of God; but, The Lord has been mindful of us, and has blessed us. He has blessed the house of Israel, He has blessed the house of Aaron Psalm 113:12. But in blessing both of these, He has blessed all that fear the Lord Psalm 113:13. Do you ask, who are meant by both of these? He answers, both small and great. That is, the house of Israel with the house of Aaron, those who among that nation believed in Jesus the Saviour....For in the character of those who out of that nation believed, it is said, Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodoma, and been made like Gomorrha. Romans 9:29 Seed, because when it has been scattered over the earth, it multiplied.

10. For the great ones, of the house of Aaron, have said, May the Lord increase you more and more, you and your children Psalm 113:14. And thus it has happened. For children that have been raised even from the stones have flocked unto Abraham: Matthew 3:9 sheep which were not of this fold, have flocked unto him, that there might be one flock, and one shepherd; the faith of all nations was added, and the number grew, not only of wise priests, but of obedient peoples; the Lord increasing not only their fathers more and more, who in Christ might show the way to the rest who should imitate them, but also their children, who

should follow their fathers' pious footsteps.

11. Therefore the Prophet says unto these great and small, the mountains and the little hills, the rams and the young sheep, what follows: You are the blessed of the Lord, who made heaven and earth Psalm 113:15. As if he should say, You are the blessed of the Lord, who made the heaven in the great, earth in the small: not this visible heaven, studded with luminaries which are objects to these eyes. For The heaven of heavens is the Lord's Psalm 113:16; who has elevated the minds of some saints to such a height, that they became teachable by no man, but by God Himself; in comparison of which heaven, whatever is discerned with carnal eyes is to be called earth; which He has given to the children of men; that when it is contemplated, whether in that region which illumines above, as that which is called heaven, or in that which is illumined beneath, which is properly called earth (since in comparison with that which is called heaven of heaven, the whole, as we have said, is earth;) the whole therefore of this earth He has given to the children of men, that by the consideration of it, as far as they can, they may conceive of the Creator, whom with their yet weak hearts they cannot see without that aid to their conception.

12. ...But nevertheless since they derive the truth and richness of wisdom, not from man nor through man, but through God Himself, they have received little ones who shall be heaven, that they may know that they are heaven of heaven; as yet however earth, unto which they say, I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. 1 Corinthians 3:6 For to those very sons of men whom He made heaven, He who knows how to provide for the earth through heaven, has given earth upon which they work. May they therefore abide, heaven and earth, in their God, who made them, and let them live from Him, confessing unto Him, and praising Him; for if they choose to live from themselves, they shall die, as it is written, From the dead, as though he were not, confession ceases. Sirach 17:26 But, The dead praise not You, O Lord, neither all they that go down into silence Psalm 113:17. For the Scripture in another passage proclaims, The sinner, when he comes into the abyss of wickednesses, scorns. But we, who live, will praise the Lord, from this time forth for evermore Psalm 113:18.

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