

331 Our help and our shield

In Psalm 115 the Holy Spirit gives us much timely encouragement for today, despite more than 3,000 years having passed since these words were first given for the blessing of God's people!

The words, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory ..." (Psalm 115.1a, KJV), set the tone for what is to follow.

The heathen were as active then as they still are today, sneering over God's existence (v 2), and worshipping, often without realising it, things that turn out to be utterly useless when it comes to what really matters in our lives (vv 4-7). Modern-day examples would include the worship of wealth, possessions, status, success, popularity, self-pleasure and self-fulfilment. The folly of people who focus on such priorities is then bluntly stated in verse 8 – "They that make them (the idols just described) are like unto them; [so is] every one that trusteth in them". God's Word can always be relied upon to "tell it the way it is"!

But then, by contrast, the emphasis in the Psalm changes. Three groups of people are addressed - "O Israel; O house of Aaron; and, Ye that fear the Lord". This is followed by a simple, identical instruction addressed to each group: "trust thou in the Lord: he is their help and their shield" (vv 9,10, 11, KJV).

The mention of Israel refers of course to God's chosen covenant people, the "apple of His eye" (egs., Deuteronomy 32.10 / Lamentations 2.18 / Zechariah 2.8). Their whole history, since the time of God's call to Abram (Genesis 12), has been an intermingling of obedience and disobedience on their part, with the Lord intervening time after time, when sought out in repentance, as a true "help and shield" for His wayward people.

The reference to the "house of Aaron" is equally significant, for the priests, in the Aaronic line, held a crucial position within Israel. To them was entrusted the proper functioning of the tabernacle, and, later on, of the temple itself. If the members of "the house of Aaron" were true and reverent in their conduct, faithfully serving as the God-appointed "go-betweens" between the Lord and His people, then the people in general were far more likely to be kept "on the right track".

Equally the opposite was true. We are told for example that Hophni and Phinehas, "the sons of Eli [were] sons of Belial; they knew not the Lord"

(I Samuel 2.12-17, “Belial” denoting someone totally worthless). This blatant corruption at the heart of the nation’s worship life was bound to have a negative effect, and sure enough, defeat by the Philistines, and the loss of the ark of the covenant, soon followed (I Samuel Chapter 4 makes sober reading). Those in Christian leadership these days do well to take note.

Back in Psalm 115.11, the words “Ye that fear the Lord” refer to those “in-comers” dwelling within Israel who did indeed “fear the Lord” and proved this fear by observing the laws and customs of the Israelites. In New Testament times such believers in Judaism were termed “proselytes”.

So all who “fear the Lord”, both in the Israel of long ago and in the Church, “the body of Christ”, of today, are bidden simply to “trust in the Lord” for He is our “help and shield”. The instruction is simple, even obvious, but it still needs to be held before us! – for how easy it is to end up trusting in various “helps and shields” other than the Lord. Some of these no doubt have a legitimate place in our Christian discipleship, such as some basic financial planning for possible future needs, but may such provision always be kept within the greater context of the Lord Himself being our true “help and shield”.

We are living in times of increasing lawlessness, turbulence and uncertainty, with the possibility - there is no sense in Christians ignoring this – of sudden catastrophe or of sudden death itself, be this from illness, accident, terrorist atrocity or some other unexpected cause. We think of recent “natural disasters”, plane crashes and Sri Lanka on Easter morning.

Yet come what may, and for abundant reasons, not least for the fact of Christ’s resurrection from that tomb, we can be utterly sure that the Lord is, and really will be, and really will be seen to be, “our help and shield”. This great assurance applies now, day by day, whatever may befall, for each day is “the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it” (Psalm 118.24)! And this “help and shield” assurance will remain as we pass through into the next, greater, fuller, lovelier stage of our lives which Jesus has told us, and proved to us, truly lies beyond for all who “trust in the Lord”.

We can finish this time with a few more words from Psalm 115 - “The Lord hath been mindful of us ... He will bless them that fear the Lord,

both small and great ... we will bless the Lord from this time forth and for evermore. Praise the Lord!" (from vv 12a,13,18).

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