

“Giving Thanks”
November 26, 2023
Psalm 100: 1-5

I. Introduction:

On the Sunday after Thanksgiving, it seemed appropriate that we consider “Giving Thanks.” We are a people and a nation that have been truly blessed by God. Of all those who “give thanks to Him and praise His name,” as Christians, our names should be at the top of the list of those giving thanks!

People make wish lists for Christmas, lists of resolutions for New Years, and on Thanksgiving some people make lists of all those things for which they are thankful. If we were to take time to make a Thanksgiving list, we would find that we have much more to be thankful for than just our material possessions. Our list would include major things like life, health, family, friends, and, despite all its flaws, the nation we live in—which is still the best nation around. In addition to that, we’d find that we are thankful for our salvation, our church family, and the mercy that God showers on us each day. With Jesus and His love, we have so much to be thankful for on Thanksgiving! James 1:17 says, “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”

Has it ever occurred to you that no Americans were more underprivileged than that small handful from the Mayflower who started the custom of setting aside a day of Thanksgiving to Almighty God? They had no homes and no government agency to help them build homes. They had no means of transportation but their own legs. Their only food came from the sea and the forest, and they had to get it for themselves—sometimes at great risk. They had no money and no place to spend it if they’d had any. They had no amusements except what they made for themselves, no means of communication with their relatives in England, no health insurance, no social security, no Medicare. But anyone who dared to call them underprivileged would probably have ended up in the stocks, for they did have 4 of the greatest human assets: initiative, courage, a willingness to work, and a boundless faith in God.

“A boundless faith in God” sounds kind of strange today in a time when powerful forces are at work in our nation and our culture to strip us of every reminder that the very foundation of our nation was built upon the conviction that we are *“one nation, under God.”* Our **"Declaration of Independence"** proclaims, *“We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights . . .”* And it ends with these words, *“. . .with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.”*

One might assume that because of the example of our forefathers, and because today we have so much, that we would be an extremely thankful people. But it is often just the opposite, isn't it? The more we get, the less thankful we become, the less mindful of God we are, and the more we want.

In **Deuteronomy 8:10-18** God said to the Israelites in so many words, *“When you come into the promised land, and settle down in your warm homes, and you have plenty to eat, don't forget Me. I led you out of the wilderness and I brought you into a land flowing with milk and honey.”* The problem was that it didn't take very long for the people of Israel to do just that, and I am afraid that we can be just as guilty. Psalm 100 reminds all of us of the Reason for Giving Thanks.

II. The Reason for Giving Thanks

This time of year, there is a real danger of determining our level of thanksgiving on the basis of how much we have. *“Do I have enough turkey to gorge myself sufficiently? Is my money in the bank secure? Am I healthy?”* Things shouldn't determine whether or not we are thankful. We all know that these things may change at any time. They may drift away, or burn up, or someone may steal them. The only thing we have for sure is our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. And that is what the 100th Psalm emphasizes—this is the basis for thanksgiving—the love of our Awesome God and Heavenly Father.

In **1 Corinthians 4:7** Paul asked the Corinthian Christians a couple of questions: **“What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?”** Psalm 100

gives the answer; it's found in every verse. The basis of our thanksgiving, the reason for giving thanks isn't a *"thing;"* it is the Lord and all that He is.

I've read that Alex Haley, the author of *"Roots,"* had an unusual picture hanging on his office wall. It was a picture of a turtle on top of a fence post. *When asked, "Why is that there?" Alex Haley answered, "Every time I write something significant, every time I read my words and think that they are wonderful, and begin to feel proud of myself, I look at the turtle on top of the fence post and remember that he didn't get there on his own. He had help."* The reason for giving thanks is to remember that we got where we are with the help of God, and that He is the provider of every blessing we have—**Ephesians 1:3** puts it this way, **"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."**

III. FIVE THANKSGIVING COMMANDS

A. "Shout for joy to the Lord." Psalm 100 is actually a series of 5 commands regarding giving thanks. The first command is in vs. 1, **"Shout for joy to the Lord."** It means a shout of loyalty and homage; a shout of joy to the Lord that comes from the very depths of one's heart. **Turn to 1 Kings 18:36-39.** This was a shout of joy, of loyalty, of homage to God Almighty. Maybe, in the past year, God has solved your problem. Maybe He has given you the direction to go. Maybe He has provided a blessing—so from the depths of your being—from your heart proclaim His praise--**"Shout for joy to the Lord."**

A pastor tells a story of a missionary who came up to him one day after he had delivered his sermon. *The missionary introduced himself and said, "I was a medical missionary for many years in India. And I served in a region where there was progressive blindness. People were born with healthy vision, but there was something in that area that caused people to lose their sight as they grew older." But this missionary had developed a treatment which would stop progressive blindness. So, people came to him, and he performed his treatment, and they would leave realizing that they would have become completely blind, but because of him their sight had been saved.*

He said that they never said, “Thank you,” because that phrase was not in their dialect. Instead, they spoke a word that meant, “I will tell your name.” Wherever they went, they would tell the name of the missionary who had cured their blindness. They had received something so wonderful that they eagerly proclaimed it.

And that is what the Psalmist is saying. *“Suddenly you realize that God has been so good to you that you can’t keep it inside anymore. From the depths of your being shout your joy to the Lord.”* You tell his name. **“Shout for joy to the Lord.”**

B. “Serve the Lord with gladness.” The 2nd command is found in **Psalm 100:2**. Contrary to the NIV translators, the first word should be “Serve” not “Worship.” **“Serve the Lord with gladness.”** It doesn’t say “Serve the church.” It doesn’t say “serve the preacher, or serve the leaders, or serve some organization.” It says, **“Serve the Lord.”**

The Bible teaches that if we witness on behalf of the Lord, if we feed the hungry, if we clothe the naked, if we do the work of the Lord, whatever it might be, we are serving the Lord. **Turn to Matthew 25:31-40.** Jesus said, **“Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”** Serve with gladness. It’s natural to desire appreciation when we do something that is worthwhile. But **Colossians 3:23** says, **“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men,”** Or as the Psalmist wrote, **“In whatever you do, serve the Lord with gladness.”**

C. “Come before Him with joyful songs.” The third command is, **“Come before Him with joyful songs.”** As he stood in awe before God, Habakkuk said in **Habakkuk 3:18**, **“I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior.”** In these first 3 commands in Psalm 100, children of God are told to “shout with joy, serve with gladness, and come with joyful songs.” **Turn to Ephesians 5:18-20.** **1 Thess. 5:16** says, **“Be joyful always.”** How about you—do you have joy, God’s joy in your heart? Is it seen on your face, in your actions, in your attitudes? The Psalmist said, **“Come before Him and serve Him and sing His praise with joy in your heart.”** **“Come before Him with joyful songs.”**

D. “Know that the LORD is God.” The 4th command is “**Know that the LORD is God.**” God took every bone, every joint, and He held them together with tendons, ligaments, and muscles. He covered them with skin. He gave us eyes that see, brains that think, and fingers that can pick things up. God made us, inside and out. He made you exactly the way He wanted you to be. Everything you are and have is from God. God in His wisdom decided that He wanted you in just the shape and size you are. Before time began, He had you in mind, and He made you just exactly the way He wanted—**GOD DOESN’T MAKE MISTAKES.** “**Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his.**”

And He is still making us—**Philippians 1:6** says, “**Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.**” This is important to remember: God isn’t satisfied with an unfinished product. He’s not satisfied with the weak areas of our lives where we are giving in to temptation. So, He’s still making us. He’s still working on our lives. God is your maker, and you are created in His image. Therefore, give Him thanks for who you are.

The psalmist then said, “**We are His people, the sheep of His pasture.**” Most of us want to be shepherds, not sheep. “*It’s not any fun being sheep,*” we think. But the problem is: we don’t know where the still waters and green pastures are. And every time we go out searching for them ourselves, we invariably end up lost in a dark place. God is saying, “*You be the sheep. Let me be the shepherd, and I will lead you beside the still waters and the green pastures. Just let me lead.*” In **1 Thessalonians 5:18** Paul wrote, “**Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.**” If you are following the leading of your Lord and Savior, then you will be able to give thanks in all circumstances—the difficult as well as the good—because as **Philippians 4:7** says, “**The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**”

E. “Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise.” Finally, the psalmist says, “**Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise.**” In the O.T., the temple symbolized the presence of God. So, whenever the people came to the temple and entered the courtyards, they knew that they had come

into the presence of God. Now that temple no longer exists. Sometimes, today, the place where we meet to worship God is called a "sanctuary," indicating that God is there. But God is really omnipresent, i.e., He is everywhere. He is with you as you drive on the highway. He is with you when you are at work or are in school. He is with you every moment of your life and everywhere you go. 1 Cor. 3:16 says, “Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?” That is the source of our thanksgiving, isn't it? The psalmist summed it up this way: “Give thanks to him and praise his name, for the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.”

IV. Conclusion:

This all sounds good, but I wonder: What if God began to treat us like we so often treat Him? What if God met our needs to the same extent that we give Him our lives—our thanks? What if we never saw another flower bloom because we grumbled when God sent the rain? What if God stopped loving and caring for us because we failed to love and care for others? What if God took away His message because we wouldn't listen to His messenger? Or we wouldn't share it with others? What if He wouldn't bless us today because we didn't thank Him yesterday? What if God answered our prayers the way we answer His call for service? What if God decided to stop leading us tomorrow because we did not follow Him today?

Thanksgiving is a man-made holiday so that everyone can take time to give thanks for what they have. As Christians, every day should be Thanksgiving. We need to “enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name” every day. Paul put it this way in Colossians 3:17, “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” Think of what God has done for you in the past, what He is doing for you now, and will do for you in the future and your heart will overflow with thanksgiving to the Lord. Let me close with Paul's thankful response to God from Ephesians 3:20-21: “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen.”