

Called To Give Thanks

by Mark Jarvinen

INTRODUCTION

We've just come through another Thanksgiving. What did your Thanksgiving include? We know that Thanksgiving is much more than the three F's - food, family, football. True thanksgiving is more than a holiday every fourth Thursday in November. For God's people, every day is an opportunity to give thanks.

That said, Thanksgiving Day in America is a distinctive holiday. It doesn't commemorate a battle or anyone's birthday. Did you know that in 1789, **George Washington** made a public proclamation saying that, ***"It is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor?"*** He recommended and assigned Thursday, the 26th day of November 1789 to be a day of Thanksgiving.

Of course, we all know the story of the **pilgrims** and how they and the Native Americans of the area had a Thanksgiving feast in **1621** – long before Washington's proclamation. Even earlier than 1621 – we find people offering up thanks to God. In the **OT** we find a Song of Thanksgiving called **Psalm 100**. It is an invitation to join together to acknowledge the great things that God has done. Not only does Psalm 100 call us to praise the Lord with thankfulness – but it also describes to us the nature of thanksgiving.

Follow along as I read this Psalm of Thanksgiving:

*Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth!
Serve the LORD with gladness!
Come into his presence with singing!
Know that the LORD, he is God!
It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.
Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise!
Give thanks to him; bless his name!
For the LORD is good;
his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations. (Ps. 100:1-5 - ESV)*

WE TEND TO FORGET

In the days of **Moses**, this great leader of God's people prepared their hearts for the day they would enter into the land of promise.

Listen to the words of Moses found in **Deuteronomy 8:7, 10-11**.

***“For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land -
When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God
for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not
forget the Lord your God,”***

But as we read through the **OT**, it doesn't take long to see that God's people would need numerous reminders to praise and thank God for his bounteous provision. **Psalm 100**, is one such reminder. Israel needed these reminders and so do we. Notice to whom this Psalm is addressed: **v. 1** – ***“all the earth,”*** and **v. 5** – ***“all generations.”*** Thus the importance of thanksgiving is so deep and so wide that it applies to every person of every generation who has ever lived! As we look at all 5 verses of Psalm 100, **vv. 1-3**, and **v. 5** mention ***“the Lord”*** as the object of thanks, and **v. 4** refers to the Lord with the use of the third-person pronoun ***“him,”*** and a reference to ***“his name.”*** Thus, the focus of our Thanksgiving, according to Psalm 100, is the Lord.

Our human tendency is to be self-centered and proud in our own sense of entitlement. We're very much like the little boy who, with his mother, was sharing a bench at a shopping mall with a kindly older gentleman. The man offered the boy an **orange**, after which the boy's mother, in an attempt to teach her son proper etiquette, said to her son, ***"What do you say to the nice man?"*** The little boy thought for a moment, handed the orange back and said, ***"Would you peel it?"***

Earlier we heard the text from **Luke 17** read to us about Jesus' healing of the **10 lepers** and how it was only one of them who returned to say thank you. Years ago, a **shipwreck** took place off the shore of **Evanston, Illinois**, a suburb of Chicago located on the North shore of Lake Michigan. A number of students attending **Northwestern University** came to the rescue. One student, named **Edward Spenser**, personally saved the lives of 17 persons from the waters of Lake Michigan that day. Years later, a reporter, writing a follow-up story on the events of that day, interviewed Spenser, and asked him about the one thing that stood out most clearly in his memory of that incident. He simply stated, ***"I remember that of the 17 people I helped save that day, not one of them ever thanked me."*** (eSermons.com, 2001).

THE NATURE OF OUR CALLING

Giving thanks to the Lord is our privilege and our calling. Let's look at several key phrases in our text that highlight the nature of our calling to give thanks.

1) SHOUT FOR JOY

"Make a joyful noise to the Lord all the earth ..." v. 1.

Some will make a joyful noise when the right football team wins a victory on Thanksgiving Day. As God's people, we have a far greater victory to celebrate, don't we? Through Christ, we have victory over death – the ultimate reason to celebrate with joy and thanksgiving. I **Corinthians 15:54-55, 57** says:

“Death has been swallowed up in victory, ‘Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?’ ... He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

2) WORSHIP WITH GLADNESS

“Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing!” (v. 2). The NIV says, ***“Worship the Lord with gladness!”***

Author **Roland Allen** tells the story of a medical missionary who served in India for many years. He served in a region where for some unknown reason, a great number of people suffered from progressive blindness. They were born with normal vision, but over the years they would slowly lose their sight. After careful research, the missionary developed a treatment that effectively stopped this progressive blindness. Those treated by him would leave his care realizing that he had saved them from complete blindness. The missionary said, ***“They would never say ‘thank you,’ because the word simply wasn’t in their dialect. Instead, they spoke a word that meant, ‘I will tell your name.’”*** Wherever they went, those who were spared from blindness would gratefully proclaim his name.

The author of **Psalms 100** tells us that there will come those moments in life when we'll realize that God is so good in all that He's done for us that our only response will be to serve Him in worship – to tell of His Name - and come into His presence with singing.

3) KNOW THAT HE IS GOD

“Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture” (v. 3).

One of the biggest problems we as humans have is remembering that God is God and we are NOT. **Verse 3** tells us that **God is the Lord**. He is our ruler and the master over everything – the big boss. We have no more control over God than we do over the weather. On Thanksgiving Day this year, our high was in the 30’s. A few years ago, it was sunny and 60 degrees, because I remember joking with my neighbor that we shouldn’t have put our deck furniture away so soon. However, by evening of that same day the wind chill was in single digits and there was a layer of ice on the road as we returned home from our dinner engagement in Chaska. We don’t control the weather. We don’t control God. God is the Lord.

Verse 3 also reveals that **God is Creator**. ***“It is he who made us....”*** The one who creates is greater than what has been created. The one who creates has every right over that which he has made. Therefore, God alone is worthy of all thanks and praise.

Furthermore, **v. 3** also refers to **God as Shepherd** – ***“... we are his people and the sheep of his pasture.”*** In other words, it is God who guides us to the place of security, provision, and rest. I’m reminded of **Psalms 23:1-3a** at this point –

“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul”

Someone has rightly said,

***If we are created, He is the Creator.
If we are sheep, He is our Shepherd.
If we enter his courts, He is our King.
If we serve Him, He is our Master.***

The Lord is all these things, and therefore is worthy of our deepest gratitude.

IV. ENTER INTO HIS PRESENCE WITH THANKSGIVING.

“Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations” (vv. 4-5).

Thanksgiving is the verbal expression of what flows out of a thankful heart. As we live our lives, mindful of God’s constant presence, and that he is good, loving and faithful to us in all circumstances, an attitude of gratitude will be developed that will express itself in thanksgiving.

One of the best illustrations of this I’ve heard comes from the classic autobiography of Corrie ten Boom, called **The Hiding Place**. Corrie and her sister Betsie, committed Christians of Dutch descent, were being held captive at **Ravensbruck**, a Nazi concentration camp, for their role in helping Jews escape the Nazi Holocaust during WWII. Betsie eventually died in captivity there, but before her death, Corrie and she were forced to take off all their clothes during an inspection of the prisoners. Corrie stood in line feeling forsaken and defiled. Suddenly, she remembered that Jesus had hung naked on the cross in the face of jeering enemies. Struck with wonder and worship during that seemingly forsaken moment, Corrie leaned forward and

whispered to her sister: ***“Betsie, they took His clothes too.”*** Betsie gasped and said, ***“Oh Corrie, and I never thanked Him.”*** Both sisters worshipped quietly, giving thanks to their Savior who understood exactly what it was like to appear naked before His captors. Thanksgiving isn’t always in response to what material blessings have been provided by God, but sometimes it’s simply given in recognition of what our Savior has done for us.

It’s so easy to walk through life saying, ***“Woe is me!”*** - thinking only of the things that aren’t going our way; e.g. the prosperity we’ve been denied, our health that has in some way become compromised, the relationships that have disappointed us, the accomplishments that have eluded us, and the list could go on and on. On Wednesday, Martha and I had breakfast with **Mike and Barb Ysteboe**, who lost their 30-something daughter and mother of three, suddenly, about two years ago. When we asked them how it was going, they said, ***“It hurts every day, but God has been faithful.”*** It is precisely in those kind of moments that **v. 5** of our text reminds us of what is true:

“For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations” (v.5).

CONCLUSION:

God is **good**, He **loves** you forever, and He’s always **faithful** – three bedrock truths to cling to whenever you’re feeling sorry of yourself or are tempted to complain. I’ll never forget a greeting taught to us at a **Promise Keeper** gathering in Washington D.C. Picture 50,000 men greeting each other during that weekend of celebration and worship in the following manner. One man would approach another saying **“God is good, all the time.** Then that man would

respond by saying, “**And all the time, God is good.**” Let’s close our service today, in a spirit of thanksgiving by practicing this greeting with one another. **A-men.**