

Well, it is Thanksgiving weekend. A special time to give thanks. So here's what we are going to do this morning. Turn to someone near you that is not an immediate family member - that takes out mom, dad, son, daughter, sister, brother. Get with this person around you and tell them one thing that you were thankful to God for this past week. Go on, you have a couple of minutes. I hope you had a special time with family as you celebrated Thanksgiving. For me, family is a huge part of Thanksgiving. In fact in my 42 years, I have only missed two Thanksgiving's with my family in St. Louis. One was in 1989 when I went to see the Cowboys play on Thanksgiving day. Sadly, those were those losing years at the end of the 80's. The other was this year. However, we were able to begin our own traditions with family that I hope my children learn to appreciate and love.

Another big part of Thanksgiving for us, as I'm sure it is for many of you is the food – turkey, dressing, mashed potatoes, rolls, gravy, green bean casserole...and on and on. And of course there is football, professional and college – and then for those weird souls who get up at 4:00 in the morning on the day following Thanksgiving there is “Black Friday,” where you go to get the best deals and do your Christmas shopping.

But you know what is interesting to me is that we have a holiday that is based around and set up in order for us to give thanks. This holiday, which, as you know, has its origin back with the Pilgrims around 1621, when they celebrated and gave thanks for their harvest along with the local Indians who had helped them adapt to the new land as they had come over to what is now Massachusetts from England. They gave thanks for the bountiful harvest and how God had blessed them. However, Thanksgiving did not move toward becoming a national holiday until 1863 when Abraham Lincoln proclaimed the last Thursday in November a national day of Thanksgiving. Here is what he said in a Thanksgiving Proclamation at a time in which the Civil War was still taking place.

The year that is drawing toward its close has been filled with the blessings of fruitful years and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the Source from which they come, others have been added which are of so extraordinary a nature that they can not fail to penetrate and soften even the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever-watchful providence of Almighty God.

(After listing blessings the nation had received, he says) <Not on the screen> No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy.

It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently, and gratefully acknowledged, as with one heart and one voice, by the whole American people. I do therefore invite my fellow-citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next as a day of thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the heavens.

A national day of thanks – recognized as a need by our 16th president - now, a national holiday called Thanksgiving. But, is this what God intended? I'm sure that it does not displease God that we have a holiday that is designed to give Him thanks. But, as often happens, has our

“Thanks” become wrapped up in a holiday, and then traditions and so on? This morning I would like to look at “giving thanks” and how God guides us in thankfulness from His word.

Giving Thanks. To give thanks is to be grateful, to show appreciation for what has been received or done for you. Pretty simple. However, this can be difficult to do – to give thanks to God and show appreciation, especially when the things that we are dealing with, that are right in front of us, those difficult situations do not offer reassurance or hope.

However, we can start addressing this by looking at **1 Thess. 5:18**. Would you turn with me there?

Here Paul writes “give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.” This is God’s will, His plan for you in your relationship with Christ Jesus. We are to give thanks in all circumstances that we face. **This means that we can and should acknowledge God in everything we do. Even during the hardest and the toughest challenges you face – you are to give thanks.** In the midst of what you’re enduring you are to give thanks to God for Him being with you and His work in your life.

In our relationship with Christ Jesus we are brought together with God, holy and pure. As we conform our life to Christ and become like Him we form a life of thanks, not because we are told to but because this is a reflection of whom Jesus is and in Him we give thanks to God in all things.

So, Why should we give thanks to God? Well, let's start with the most basic – but which needs to be said because it is so profound – **He is God!** He is great, **He created us and He does great things. He is worthy of recognition. He is worthy of all praise, worship and gratitude.** He should be thanked, and He does desire our thanks and praise.

Second, again – obvious but we often miss it. **We are not God!** (repeat) We are not worthy. We fail, **We fail, we deceive, and we fall short of what God intended us to be.** We often take credit for what we have not done, for what we are not able to do and only He can do.

A good example of these two points is Psalm 107. Please turn there with me and let's go through this Psalm of Thanksgiving together.

Psalm 107 - We are going to see 5 ways/thing to give thank for...

Verses 1-7

The psalmist starts by saying:

***1 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his love endures forever.***

2 Let the redeemed of the LORD say this—

This is the phrase that sets us up for the rest of the psalm. He is saying ***let those who know God who have been forgiven make the following known to all people.***

READ verses 2b – 7

Now, look back at the way the psalmist described the people here.

They were wanderers, hungry, thirsty, their lives ebbed away, - they cried out and God delivered – led them by a straight way.

These are the things for which the psalmist is saying “Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His love endures forever” Here’s how we know – here is an example – this is what He has done – give Him thanks for this, so the psalmist writes in verse 8...

**⁸ Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love
and his wonderful deeds for men,**

This is a focus verse here as it will be repeated - “**Let them give thanks to the LORD for His unfailing love and His wonderful deeds for men.**”

Verse 9 : ⁹ for he satisfies the thirsty

and fills the hungry with good things...here he sums up what God has done – what the the psalmist stated in verses 2 – 7 – He is giving thanks for **God’s acts of meeting physical needs.**

(READ verses 10 – 14.)

They were in darkness, suffering in prison and subjected to bitter labor – this coming from God because of their rebellion – they were dealing with the consequences of their actions.

And then – they cried out to God for help – he saved them - brought them out of the darkness that they sat in with no hope and He broke away their chains.

Then the psalmist writes in 15 and 16 -

**¹⁵ Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love
and his wonderful deeds for men,**

**¹⁶ for he breaks down gates of bronze
and cuts through bars of iron.**

Here again, he restates what God does and has done – which is **God’s liberating acts in releasing his people from bondage.** -_physical and spiritual

READ verses 17 – 20

Again we see rebellion, and the results of such choices.

They became fools, suffered affliction because of their iniquity, they couldn’t eat and they were close to death

But then they too cried out and He saved them from distress, he sent forth his word and healed them

Verses 21-22

**²¹ Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love
and his wonderful deeds for men.**

**²² Let them sacrifice thank offerings
and tell of his works with songs of joy.**

Here again the thanks and notice of God’s works are for God’s redeeming acts – **God’s redemptive acts for His people and for us when we have gotten into trouble and are dealing with the consequences of our actions.**

(READ verses 23 – 30)

Some were tossed at sea, merchants - struggling to survive, all courage was gone, they were falling over like drunken men moved by the sea
They cried out to the Lord and He brought them out of distress
He stilled the storm, they were glad when it was calm, they felt relief

Then the psalmist writes

³¹ **Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men.**

³² **Let them exalt him in the assembly of the people and praise him in the council of the elders.**

The Psalmist is saying let the people know what God has done – spread the news – give Him thanks and praise Him for His acts. **And this time the thanks is lifted up for God’s saving acts when His people are in danger and dealing with the storms around them. Storms that God himself may speak into being so that they, so “we” may cry out to Him.**

Now look what the psalmist does next as he writes of God’s power, sovereignty and worthiness of thanks.

(READ - Verses 33-34) - Because of sin and rebellion, God destroys and makes waste. Rivers become dessert, bountiful land becomes a salt waste and the ground is thirsty.

Then – now look at verses 35 -38 (READ) – He blesses them. Dessert, parched ground now has pools and springs flowing from it, they have food and a place to live, their herds and their numbers increased. God blesses them.

Then in verses 39 – 40 they struggle. **(READ)** Their numbers decrease as they are humbled by oppression, calamity and sorrow.

And in verses 41 and 42. (READ) They come out of their affliction, their numbers increase. They see. They rejoice.

This goes back and forth as the people rebel against God and then cry out to Him. But through it all we see that God is faithful. **God does not give up on His people and continues to bring them to what is best for them.**

Verse 43 (READ) – “Consider the great love of the Lord” Think about, reflect on, meditate on the great love of the Lord.

When you look at this psalm you see God working throughout. In the hunger, the thirst, the bondage, the imprisonment, the affliction, the poor choices and the repercussions. We see Him loving and working, bringing those He loves to where they need to be. He brings them out of the place where they claim to have all the answers and they rely on self, where they disrespect and ignore Him. Instead, thankfulness is given to God as the one who loves and meets needs.

God is loving. God is working. **Consider the great love of the Lord. (repeat) We have to be careful not to reduce our “Thanks” to God down to one day set aside for a “Holiday” or to only situations that are pleasing to us. We love it when we see how His love flows in areas of our life and when we recognize His hand at work, but we also need to give thanks for His deeds even at times we don’t understand why.**

We see the opportunity for this in the book of Isaiah where we see **God’s love demonstrated** toward a people that did not deserve it, similar to us today. Isaiah was a prophet for the southern kingdom of Judah at a time when there was consistent conflict and war from invading armies. Israel, the northern kingdom, was attacked and destroyed by the Assyrians during Isaiah’s lifetime. Judah along with its capital city, Jerusalem were almost conquered until King Hezekiah was broken before God, sought Him and God told Isaiah to prophesy that Jerusalem would not fall to the Assyrians. Isaiah did go on to say however, that the nation of Judah would be conquered and taken away to Babylon. This ended up happening about 100 years after the Book of Isaiah was written.

Prophecies of destruction, however, are not the only thing that Isaiah included in this book as God’s love is so vividly shown. God also gave Isaiah much to say about redemption, hope and salvation and this was not just for God’s people then, but for generations to come, up to the present day. These prophecies, given in a time of destruction and weakness brought hope to the entire world. These prophecies were another reason for those people who sought God to thank Him even in very difficult circumstances.

Turn to Isaiah, chapter 9: 6-7 and then chapter 11:2-5. Let’s look at the some of the prophecies Isaiah gave.

READ Isaiah 9:6-7 and 11:2-5

We know now, that these verses were foretelling the coming of Jesus, the Messiah, God’s Son who would take away the sins of the world. But for Judah, and Israel, when this was written, it had much more to do with their present circumstances. They were looking for hope and help in a time of a national and world turmoil. Though many despised Isaiah when this was written because of the very sin in their life that eventually led to destruction that came, this was still a source of hope for many, especially 100 years later when the Babylonians came in and took them into captivity. They would have been able to give thanks in the midst of tragedy because God showed himself as one who had not abandoned them and had a plan.

A Messiah would come and He was not going to be an earthly ruler who overthrows the present authorities as those in captivity believed for so many years. God was not thinking that small. **He had a much bigger plan in mind -one that would bring salvation to all who believed, not just the nation of Israel.** This is a wonderful demonstration of God’s love. The people, for hundreds of years after this was written continued to look forward to His coming. And for us, this has already taken place. We are not hoping for, looking for the promised Messiah to come. He came, as promised over 2000 years ago, close to 700 years after the book of Isaiah was written. We rejoice and thank God for Jesus, God’s Son that has come, the same one they thanked God for who was prophesied to come.

Now today, November 29, 2009 is not just the first Sunday after Thanksgiving, but it is also the first Sunday of Advent - the time preceding Christmas where we celebrate Christ's coming and "look forward" to His birth. This is the greatest gift to ever be given. The Holy Son of God appearing on earth in the flesh as a baby boy. One who was and is the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. **The King of Kings who created all things and whose rightful place is on the throne, humbled Himself to become like us, to give Himself as a sacrifice for us, paying the debt we owe for our sins on the cross; and then to overcome sin and death forever by being raised to life 3 days later.** (repeat) **Now that is something for which to give thanks!**

What are you thankful for in your life? What have you truly given God thanks for today? What is He doing? How is His presence being made known in your life? This is not just a holiday thing. Don't get me wrong. I love Thanksgiving and I am glad we live in a nation where we have a holiday based on giving thanks to God, even if it is losing its meaning. The question is, are we living, facing and going through life with a thankful heart, especially giving thanks for God's only Son, Jesus?

I have a clip I would like you to see, please watch this video. **(VIDEO)**

What we cannot miss this morning is that God calls for us to give thanks in everything, everyday and to recognize His hand, His work even in the hardest of circumstances and trials in our life. I know that is not easy. **But God has shown Himself to be one who is always there – working, guiding in our midst for His glory. Even in the middle of our sin and rejection of Him He is working** as we saw in the 107th Psalm.

In Isaiah 55:8-9 God tells us,

⁸ "For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,"
declares the LORD.

⁹ "As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

In those most difficult times of loss or suffering, of financial failure or broken family, of academic failure or plans and careers that did not come about as we thought, God is working. He has plans that are beyond our thinking for which we need to thank Him and trust Him. Even when we are at a place that we don't see how this could ever work out for anything good, we give thanks because He is God, He is working and He is revealing Himself to us in everything we do.

We have a God that loves us and sent His Son to die for us. He has shown Himself faithful. We need to be thanking God for this precious gift all year round and at this special time of advent when we welcome His coming. What a wonderful time this is. We are not at a place of hoping, waiting for Jesus to come. We are celebrating His coming. We are celebrating the gift that we already have! Don't miss this wonderful and commanded part of being a believer in Christ. You get to show thanks and gratitude to your Creator, your Savior your Lord. You get to acknowledge the one who formed you from nothing, gave His life for you and is now through His Holy Spirit helping you to grow to be like Him. May you give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.