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Thanksgiving Sunday

Give Thanks to the Lord

(November 12, 2017)

Sermon Text: Psalm 100; Rom 1

Scripture Reading: Psalm 116

A Psalm for giving thanks. 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. (Psalms 100:1-5)

This being once again the week of the Thanksgiving holiday in this nation, I thought it would be fitting for us to consider this subject of giving thanks to the Lord. It is actually a very important doctrine of Scripture and its presence or absence in a person's life tells much about them.

One of the ways we can better appreciate the goodness and importance of giving thanks to the Lord is to think about the very opposite – which is a great evil – namely, UN-thankfulness. And the classic place in Scripture to read about it is the first chapter of Romans:

Romans 1:16-25 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. (17) For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

(18) For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness

and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. (19) For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. (20) For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

(21) For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. (22) Claiming to be wise, they became fools, (23) and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

(24) Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, (25) because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

Worship is Impossible Without Thanksgiving

Unthankfulness, a willful refusal to give thanks to God, is one of the most

fundamentally wicked evils a person can practice. Here, as Paul reminds us, God has revealed Himself plainly to each one of us – to everyone in the entire world. Through His creation, which is visible to all, God’s existence, the fact that He is God, His eternity and His power, everyone knows He is there, that He has created everything there is, and that every human being owes Him worship, honor, and thanksgiving.

However, in his sin, man stubbornly refuses to do this and in fact his evil is even worse – *he refuses to even acknowledge God. That is to say, man goes about his life in this world thinking and acting as if God did not even exist.* And man does all of this *knowingly and willfully.* He knows, but he actively expends all kinds of energy suppressing his knowledge of God. Man in his sin is an idolater who would rather worship the Sun than the One who created it and all the planets and stars.

This is the fundamental reason then that God’s wrath is upon the sinner. It is at the heart of all the other evils and debased sins that we see in man today. Because when a man or woman chooses to live their life as if God were irrelevant, telling the one who gives life and breath to all things to “get lost,” God in an ironic judgment does just that:

Romans 1:24-28 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, (25) because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. (26) For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; (27) and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. (28) And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.

UN-thankfulness to God then is a wicked sin, the mark of a wicked heart.

Unthankfulness Seen in Human Nature

One important part of raising our children up in the Lord is to teach them to be thankful. And this is a very interesting subject if you will give it some thought. *Human beings by nature as they are born into this world are selfish. They are not thankful by nature.* And so any good parent realizes that a key part of raising

children is to teach them not to be selfish *and to be thankful*. We have to remind them “can you say thankful to Mrs. Smith for that?” We teach them to “give thanks” to God before eating a meal. Any child who grows up being self-centered and UN-thankful is a child we say is “spoiled.” Ruined. It is an ugly thing and is on the road to hell.

Consider what the following account of Jesus and the 10 lepers reveals:

Luke 17:11-19 On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. (12) And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance (13) and lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." (14) When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed.

(15) Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; (16) and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, **giving him thanks**. Now he was a Samaritan. (17) Then Jesus answered, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? (18) Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" (19) And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."

Do you see how incredibly hard and UN-thankful man's heart is? I have never seen a leper, but I have read about their plight, especially in ancient times. Absolute outcasts and especially in Jewish society where they were "unclean." Yet it is not the 9 Jews who came back to give Jesus thanks, it was the Samaritan!

Notice also, as we shall see in other Scriptures this morning, *that giving thanks to God is at the heart of true worship-*

Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!

How do we praise the Lord? How do we worship Him? In large part it is by giving thanks to Him. And yet only ONE of these 10 healed lepers worshipped Christ. Incredible. And as a result, this Samaritan was the one who went away that day truly healed. Jesus said to him:

And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."

That is to say, this man's sins were forgiven. He was born again by faith in Christ. His soul was healed. Not so the other nine.

An unthankful heart is an unconverted heart. A person who does not give thanks to God is a person who does not know God and who remains dead in their sins.

Prayer and Thanksgiving

And how do we give thanks to God? *We talk to Him! We TELL Him thank you. That is to say, we PRAY to Him.* Listen to J.C. Ryle here and as he talks about praying, just insert "give thanks to God" in place of it because that really is what a large part of prayer is:

This is one of the common marks of all the elect of God, "They cry unto him day and night." Luke 18:1. The Holy Spirit who makes them new creatures, works in them a feeling of adoption, and makes the cry, "Abba, Father." Romans 8:15. The Lord Jesus, when he quickens them, gives them a voice and a tongue, and says to them, "Be dumb no more." **God has no dumb children.** It is as much a part of their new nature to pray, as it is of a child to cry. They see their need of mercy and grace. They feel their emptiness and weakness. They cannot do otherwise than they do. They must pray.

I have looked carefully over the lives of God's saints in the Bible. I cannot

find one whose history much is told us, from Genesis to Revelation, who was not a person of prayer. I find it mentioned as a characteristic of the godly, that "they call on the Father," that "they call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ." **I find it recorded as a characteristic of the wicked, that "they call not upon the Lord."** 1 Peter 1:17; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Psalm 14:4.

I have read the lives of many eminent Christians who have been on earth since the Bible days. Some of them, I see, were rich, and some poor. Some were learned, and some were unlearned. Some of them were Episcopalians, and some were Christians of other names. Some were Calvinists, and some were Arminians. Some have loved to use liturgy, and some to use none. But one thing, I see, they all had in common. They have all been people of prayer.

I have studied reports of missionary societies in our own times. I see with joy that lost men and women are receiving the gospel in various parts of the globe. There are conversions in Africa, in New Zealand, in India, in China. The people converted are naturally unlike one another in every respect. But one striking thing I observe at all the missionary stations:

the converted people always pray.

I do not deny that a person may pray without heart and without sincerity. I do not for a moment pretend to say that the mere fact of a people' praying proves everything about their soul. As in every other part of religion, so also in this, there may be deception and hypocrisy.

But this I do say, that **not praying** is a clear proof that a person is not yet a true Christian. They cannot really feel their sins. They cannot love God. They cannot feel themselves a debtor to Christ. They cannot long after holiness. They cannot desire heaven. They have yet to be born again. They have yet to be made a new creature. They may boast confidently of election, grace, faith, hope and knowledge, and deceive ignorant people. But you may rest assured it is all vain talk if they do not pray.

And I say furthermore, that of all the evidences of the real work of the Spirit, a habit of hearty private prayer is one of the most satisfactory that can be named. A person may preach from false motives. A person may write books and, make fine speeches and seem diligent in good works, and yet be a Judas Iscariot. But a person

seldom goes into their closet and pours out their soul before God in secret, unless they are in earnest. The Lord himself has set his stamp on prayer as the best proof of conversion. When he sent Ananias to Saul in Damascus, he gave him no other evidence of his change of heart than this, "Behold he prays." Acts 9:11.

I know that much may go on in a person's mind before they are brought to pray. They may have many convictions, desires, wishes, feelings, intentions, resolutions, hopes, and fears. But all these things are very uncertain evidences. They are to be found in ungodly people, and often come to nothing. In many a case they are not more lasting than the morning cloud, and dew that passes away. A real hearty prayer, moving from a broken and contrite spirit, is worth all these things put together.

I know that the Holy Spirit, who calls sinners from their evil ways, does in many instances lead them by very slow degrees to acquaintance with Christ. But the eye of man can only judge by what it sees. I cannot call anyone justified until they believe. **I dare not say that anyone believes until they pray.** I cannot understand a

dumb faith. The first act of faith will be to speak to God. Faith is to the soul what life is to the body. Prayer is to faith what breath is to the body. How a person can live and not breathe is past my comprehension, and how a person can believe and not pray is past my comprehension too. [A Call to Prayer, by J.C. Ryle]

Psalms 116:16-19 O LORD, I am your servant; I am your servant, the son of your maidservant. You have loosed my bonds. (17) I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the LORD. (18) I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people, (19) in the courts of the house of the LORD, in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise the LORD!

You see then that the commonly asked question "why should I go to church?" is largely answered by this: "I go to church on the Lord's Day because I owe the Lord everything and I must give Him thanks."

The Unthankful Man

2 Timothy 3:1-2 But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. (2) For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient

to their parents, ungrateful, unholy,

We certainly live in an unthankful world today. This coming Thanksgiving Day many will sit down to a huge bounty in beautiful houses, and no one is even going to pray and give thanks before the meal. How preposterous to call the day “Thanksgiving” when there is no giving of thanks to God. As Paul tells us in Romans 1, this is the very thing that inflames God’s righteous wrath against the wicked.

What we see all around us in this day are people who seem “nice,” who we may well like to be around in many ways, who work hard and perhaps are even generous, who evidence a degree of morality, *and yet they do not give thanks to God. In fact they live without even acknowledging God which is to say that they live as if God either does not exist OR that He is entirely irrelevant to them.*

It turns out that they are not such “nice” folks after all. The One who gives them:

- Air to breathe
- Food to eat
- Clothing and shelter
- Life itself

- Christ as a Savior for their sins if they will repent and believe in Him

...this One is not given even the smallest acknowledgement or thanks.

Acts 17:24-25 The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, (25) nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

And yet so commonly:

John 1:10-11 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. (11) He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.

Let me ask a question here of every person who might hear these words and who does not know Christ. It is an honest question and really the most important one you can put to yourself:

How can you fancy that you are in a right standing with God when you continue to live your life as if the One who created you, who gives you life, who gives you every good thing you have, is irrelevant to you? How can

you believe that when you exit this earthly life and meet your Creator, all will go well with you even though you regarded any mention of Him as at best an annoyance?

Thanksgiving to God turns out to be, you see, a much more important subject than we realize.

Psalms 86:11-13 Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name. (12) I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify your name forever. (13) For great is your steadfast love toward me; you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.

A father or mother may diligently and rightly teach their son or daughter to say “thank you” to a person, but if they are not learning to give thanks to God in Christ, it will be for nothing. If they do not come to know Christ, if their heart is not changed by Him, they will never be thankful to God and they will be lost.

Psalms 50:22-23 "Mark this, then, you who forget God, lest I tear you apart, and there be none to deliver! (23) The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me; to one who orders his way rightly I will show the

salvation of God!"

The Christian and Thanksgiving

Above all other people, the Christian surely is the most thankful – if they genuinely know Christ, that is. The true Christian knows very well how much he or she owes to the Lord in Christ:

Colossians 3:16-17 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (17) And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Our thanksgiving in this present life is bound to be imperfect and lacking because even the Christian does not fully grasp what God has done for us in His Son. Paul could only say:

2 Corinthians 9:15 Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

One day we will be able to express our thanks to God and that will be worship as we have never seen before.