



Title: Thanks to God at Thanksgiving
Theme: Biblical Expressions of Thanksgiving
Series: Full Measure of Thanksgiving

Listen as I read Psalm 100:1-5, “Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness; come before Him with joyful songs. Know that the LORD is God. It is He who made us, and we are His; we are His people, the sheep of His pasture. Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise; give thanks to Him and praise His name. For the LORD is good and His love endures forever; His faithfulness continues through all generations.”

This week we are celebrating Thanksgiving and the Holy Spirit is guiding us through the Word of God to direct our thoughts, spiritual hearts and lives toward Biblical expressions of thanksgiving to the Lord.

Because of the strength of the flesh and the powerful draw of the world, Christians are wearied by thoughts of preparing food, travel, eating, entertaining, talking with family, watching football with friends and many other things. Honestly, for many, Thanksgiving is opening day for depression and for most it is opening season of an unfulfilled life.

I would propose to you that the Lord in His great wisdom and love has prepared this Sunday, the Sunday before Thanksgiving to be an opportunity for us to offer Biblical expressions of thanksgiving unto Him! Considering how the people of God are a temple of the Holy Spirit of Christ, they have every opportunity to abound in singing, praying, giving and sharing testimony of God’s faithfulness in Christ Jesus.

A life that expresses these four truths is like incense in the temple, fragrances that are pleasing to God and to the Body of Christ. Sacrifices ended when Christ died upon the Cross, however, gratitude for the Lord’s sacrifice should not. (The Treasury of David; Spurgeon) It is His mercy and grace that enable us to enter into His Throne room and it is because of the shed blood of Christ we are able to enjoy God as “Abba,” our loving Father. (Romans 8:15)

Just how can we live out these four truths of Biblical expression in our endeavor to please the Lord?

Singing to the Lord

The first truth to enjoy in thanksgiving worship is Holy Spirit illumination of singing to the Lord. Psalm 147:7 says, “Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; make music to our God on the harp.” David, a man after God’s heart (Acts 13:22) wrote, “I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High. (Psalm 9:2) The Holy Spirit moved through David, the great song writer, to set the heartbeat of

our worship, "I will give thanks to the LORD because of His righteousness and will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High." (Psalm 7:17)

Singing about and to the Lord is not just an Old Testament commandment, but a New Testament exhortation. Romans 15:9-11 says, "Therefore, I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name." Again, it says, 'Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people.' And again, 'Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to Him, all you peoples.'" Ephesians 5:19 – 20 says, "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Satan is very successful in disrupting the song service. He amazingly is able to cause people to focus on themselves as they approach the song service or even in their private time of listening to music. Some complain about how long or how short the song service is, they complain about the hymns, the choruses, the style, the instruments and set their mind to just tolerate the song service and not participate in spirit and truth. In their private time, Satan has convinced many that it is permissible to fill their ears with secular music, thus robbing the people of God of singing praises to the Lord and missing out on sensing His pleasure in their lives and in their corporate song services.

The Body of Christ cannot give if they do not have. The song service is a reflection of the worship in singing about and to the Lord throughout the week. Anyone can work diligently to put together a song service. It is the song leader who has enjoyed worship unto the Lord with those songs who will enjoy the Holy Spirit's enabling for people to be aware of God's presence.

Rick Warren wrote, "Christianity is a singing faith. There are more songs about Jesus Christ than anything else, even more than love. There are more songs about Jesus written throughout history than any other single topic. So you need to learn to sing your thanks to God, give it back to God in joyful praise."

In Birmingham, Alabama after a powerful song service that was filled with Biblical hymns, psalms and spiritual songs, several pastors gathered around one of the song leaders of Times Square Church. They listened attentively as he shared how he has no concept of what it is like to have to ask people to lead the song service or drag the congregation into participation of singing.

All the pastors were blessed as they heard how those who were trained and skilled for music for the Lord (1 Chronicles 25:6-7) would sacrifice time and strength to get prepared for the song service they were given the opportunity to oversee. One night per week for a total of two hours with 30 minutes of that being spent in prayer, hundreds gather for preparation for six different worship services. Whether they were in the choir up front or had the privilege to lead from within

the congregation, they showed sacrificial love to God first and then unto the Body of Christ through prayerful, sacrificial preparation. This sacrifice of preparation is approached with a heart of worship, thus it not uncommon to experience vibrant song services filled with hymns, psalms and spiritual songs being sung by old and young alike, rich and poor. One can say, "But, pastor, Times Square has paid professional musicians and they have so much talent." Let the Lord place this truth within your heart, giftedness does not ensure God's presence, attitude of worship unto Him does.

On a Sunday morning, September 14, 2008 I visited a small Pentecostal Church. I arrived at 9:00 a.m. and walked into a sanctuary with just three ordinary Christians, prayerfully preparing for the morning song service. This time of sacrifice in preparation for the song service moved to a time of teaching God's Word, then to a time of people sharing what the Lord had spoken to them through the written Word. From there their worship moved into a time of congregational singing unto the Lord. During this song service I became very ill, so ill I needed to leave the sanctuary quickly and make my way into the restroom facilities. While I was in the facilities I could hear the voices of old and young alike singing powerful hymns, and choruses, and there was a time permitted for the congregation to sing as the Holy Spirit would lead.

I just set my focus upon their singing, a song service not overseen by the best, but through servants who wanted to praise the Lord. In that time of worship the Holy Spirit's presence became so evident, I was given a special grace of physical healing and felt just great.

For application's sake: What is your heart attitude toward the song service? If you are a song leader, in your preparation in getting songs in order, is there a season of praise unto the Lord with those songs? If you are in the congregation, is there a heart ready for worship, with choruses and a hunger for spiritual songs? Is the preacher more focused on His message than the songs sung about and unto the Lord?

May our spiritual hearts be like that of Charles Spurgeon who wrote, "Respond to [God]. All that He does is gracious, every movement of His hand is goodness: Therefore, let our hearts reply with gratitude, and our lips with [songs] ...of thanksgiving."

Praying to Him

The second truth to enjoy in thanksgiving worship is Holy Spirit illumination of praying to Him. 1 Thessalonians 2:8 says, "I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing." The Holy Spirit through David exhorts us with, "My heart says of you, "Seek His face!" Proverbs 15:8 tells us, "The Lord detests the sacrifices of the wicked, but the prayer of the upright pleases Him."

The whole counsel of God's Word teaches us that prayer, which includes the attitudes of the human spirit in its approach to God is a blessing to Him as we adore Him, confess to Him, praise Him and bring supplication unto Him. The highest blessing to the spiritual heart of mankind is communion with God, in the Name of Christ as led by the Holy Spirit. (New Bible Dictionary)

Listen to this important truth, "The Biblical doctrine of prayer emphasizes the character of God, the necessity of man being under the covenant relationship with the Lord, thus enabling repentant mankind to enjoy the privileges of and understanding his obligations in relation to the Lord." (New Bible Dictionary)

Those who offer prayers of thanksgiving which are pleasing to the Lord walk in a reverent fear of not having their prayers heard or hindered. (Isaiah 1:15; 29:13; 1 Peter 3:7; The Expositors Bible Commentary; Matthew Henry Commentary; Thru the Bible) The first step to offering true prayers of thanksgiving to God is to approach the Throne simply with confidence only in the shed blood of Christ.

In our Saturday morning prayer meetings we almost always open by saying, "Father, we come into your presence, not because of what we have accomplished or with great plans, but simply under the blood of Christ and we thank you that at this moment you are our 'Father' not our 'Judge.'"

Coming in the name of Christ gives Christians assurance, safety and welcome into the presence of God. (Matthew Henry Commentary) Our key theme in this message is "Biblical Expressions of Thanksgiving" and the key truth in this portion of the message is coming to the Lord in prayer. The writer of the Book of Hebrews presents a truth that must be grasped if we are to have a prayer life that pleases God, "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, His body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water." "...let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience..." (Hebrews 10:19-21)

Considering that the Body of Christ is purchased through the shed blood of Jesus, Christians should have a desire to know what it means to approach the Throne of Grace with a sincere heart. Sincere" (*alethinou*) means with an upright heart. (The Complete Word Study Dictionary; Dictionary of Biblical Languages; The Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament) The King James Bible tells us that Christians are to have a true heart when they come before the Lord. This means the person is to be characterized by Biblical integrity, trustworthiness and dependability in being the person he claims to be. (Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament; Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament) A sincere heart also involves

coming before the Lord in an attitude of gladness, freedom and enthusiasm. (Marvin Vincent, Word Studies in the New Testament; The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible)

The Sunday School times ran the story of a little servant girl who wanted to join a church and whose life exemplified the truths found through the whole counsel of God's Word. The title of the article was "Her Service."

"Dr J. H. Jowett told of the time when a little servant girl wanted to join the church he oversaw for the Lord. He asked her, 'What are you doing for the Lord?' She explained how she had so little time and her hours were always changing, making it difficult for her to be regular in attendance to services. 'However,' she said, 'I daily take the paper up to my bed room at night.' Dr Jowett replied, 'What good is that?' 'Well' explained the servant, 'I always turn to the Births, Marriages and Deaths. When I read the births, I asked God to bring these babies quickly to the Savior, Jesus Christ, at a young age that they may be a blessing. As I read about each wedding, I pray that the couples will stay true to each other and that each marriage [will be surrendered to the Lordship of Christ]. As I read each death, I pray, one by one, for all the grieving, that they may [be enabled] to turn their sorrow to the only source of lasting comfort.'" (Knights Master Book of 4,000 Illustrations)

This is the true heart that expresses thanksgiving to the Lord, the sincere heart that comes to God in thankfulness for the shed blood of Christ, the heart that is in true partnership in the "Great Commission" through prayer.

For application's sake: When accusations are made against you by the devil who is the one who works diligently to hinder your labors for the Lord and cause you to lose faith in God and when afflictions come, can the Lord say of you as he did Job? "Then the LORD said to Satan, 'Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason.'" (Job 2:3)

Holy Spirit led Christians who grasp what it means to have a true heart in coming before the Lord can pray as Hezekiah did in his affliction and trials. In his affliction of ill health Hezekiah, "...prayed to the LORD, 'Remember, O LORD, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes.'" (Isaiah 38:3) In Hezekiah's great trial of Sennacherib's treats we read of his coming to the Lord with a sincere heart and praying, "Now, O LORD our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O LORD, are God." (Isaiah 37:20) The prayer of thanksgiving to the Lord is the prayer offered for God and Christ's glory.

Christians who desire to show true thanks to the Lord in prayer long to have the walk with the Lord that Enoch had. (Genesis 5:22) They also have the heart of

their Savior, Jesus, who prayed to His Father, "...yet not my will, but yours be done." (Luke 42:22)

Giving to Him

The third truth to enjoy in thanksgiving to God is giving to Him. It has often been said, thanksgiving is both Thanks and Giving.

This week is our National Thanksgiving Holiday. Holy Spirit illuminated Christians desire to overcome the world's view of how to celebrate Thanksgiving Day. Thus, they look to the whole counsel of God's Word because there are various Scriptures referring to national feasts unto the Lord which present truths and principles that have eternal obligations. (The Pulpit Commentary)

Deuteronomy is one passage of Scripture that presents a truth worth grasping, "Three times a year all your men must appear before the LORD your God at the place He will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles. No man should appear before the LORD empty-handed: Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the LORD your God has blessed you." (Deuteronomy 16:16-17) One of the feasts the men of God were required to attend and the rest of the family and servants were certainly encouraged to participate in was The Feast of Weeks. (The Bible Knowledge Commentary; Commentary on the Old Testament; The New American Commentary) Deuteronomy 16:10 gives the people of God this exhortation, "Then celebrate the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God by giving a freewill offering in proportion to the blessings the LORD your God has given you." This feast is also referred to as the "Feast of Harvest." It was to be celebrated in times of harvest and it was to be a joyous celebration.

As the child of God grasps the heart of God in giving unto Him, they find several truths and principles to live by. One, Christians must consider the produce of the soil and other blessings as coming from the Lord. (James 1:17; Matthew Henry Commentary; Thru the Bible; Barnes Notes) No one, especially Christians are to consider any good thing they enjoy as coming from anyone other than the Lord. Two, Christians are to publicly thank God for His goodness, grace and mercy. (Psalm 9:1; 22:22; 26:7; Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary) Those who are the most influential for the Lord are those who humbly give public praise to God.

Three, Christians are to yield unto the Lord the first fruits of their blessings, financial or otherwise, in recognition that He is their source. (Leviticus 27:32; Deuteronomy 16:16-17; The Pulpit Commentary; The New American Commentary; Commentary of the Old Testament, Hendrickson; The Bible Knowledge Commentary) Four, Christians are to give to the Lord joyful expressions for the blessings He has given them. (Luke 17:12-19) Lastly, Christians are to give through whatever means the Lord has given them without showing partiality. (Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11; James 1:27)

In truth "Thanksgiving Day" in America was meant to be a religious celebration. In fact the Pilgrims called this harvest festival, "A Thanksgiving" (Pilgrim Hall Museum, America's Museum of Pilgrim Possessions) and scholarly researchers say it was celebrated in the fall time of the year. (Wikipedia Free Encyclopedia) Society for the Confluence of Festivals writes this about the first Thanksgiving at Plymouth, "The Pilgrims organized the feast right after the first harvest. It was a gesture to thank God..."

A key part of enjoying a "National Feast" unto the Lord was giving. Pastor Ralph, W. Neighbor wrote about two men who were engaged in a conversation about giving to God;

"One said, 'You give way too much money, [time and energy] to the work of God. I have decided to wait until a large sum of money comes in and then I will give.' 'No!' Said the other man, 'I give as God prospers me, and according to His plan.'"

According to Pastor Neighbor, the man who waited for his large sum of money never enjoyed the blessings of the Lord, but the man who gave generously of his time, money, and strength as the Lord provided, prospered abundantly.

He writes: "If we give willingly and cheerfully to God, we are insured for time and eternity. The greatest earthly bank is a weak institution compared with the [provisions] from heaven upon which we God-honoring Christians may draw from." (Knights Treasury of 2,000 illustrations)

Testifying of the Lord's faithfulness

The fourth truth to enjoy in thanksgiving to God is testifying of the Lord's faithfulness. Deuteronomy 4:9 says, "Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them."

The Lord in His understanding gives the people of God an exhortation and it is for us as well. We are to be careful not to forget all that we have seen Him do, great and small. Christians are leaky vessels and need to have an ongoing reflection, one that is based on the experiences they have had with the Lord, with those experiences measured to the Word of God. Historical God sightings should be celebrated regularly and faithfully passed on down to those who come behind us. We are to live with the understanding that walking in this gospel dispensation comes with its privileges and duties. (The Bible Knowledge Commentary; New Bible Commentary; Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, Old Testament; The New American Commentary; The Expositors Bible Commentary; Thru the Bible)

It is a privilege to have Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. It is our duty to teach those who come behind us that they must be born again in Christ Jesus. It is a privilege to prayerfully read and study the Word of God and to live in such a

way showing others that the written Word of God is imprinted upon our spiritual hearts by the Holy Spirit of Christ.

It is a privilege to enjoy the Holy Spirit's leading in prayer. It is our duty to express a prayer life which influences those who come behind us to look to Christ to teach them to pray. It is a privilege to know Christ, it is our duty to abide in Christ so as to exhibit the fruit of the Holy Spirit. It is a privilege to be anointed by the Holy Spirit so as to exercise Spiritual gifts, and it is our duty to exercise those gifts through sacrificial love before the eyes of others.

Those who come behind us must see our sacrifice in preparation, finances, time, and strength in our labors for the Lord. It is a privilege and responsibility to share with the generation coming behind us God's faithfulness in hearing and answering prayer, provision in good and lean times, protection and guidance in every circumstance in life and especially His everlasting unconditional love.

Karl Barth, a famed Biblical theologian, was once asked, "What is the greatest thought you ever had!" His answer, "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so." (Dale Galloway, *Rebuild Your Life*)

J. I Packer, in "Knowing God" wrote, "What matters supremely, therefore, is not, in the last analysis, the fact that I know God, but the larger fact which underlines it – that He knows me. I am graven on the palms of His hand. I am never out of His mind. All my knowledge of Him depends on His sustained initiative in knowing me. I know Him because He first knew me, and continues to know me. ...There is unspeakable comfort in knowing that God is constantly taking knowledge of me in love and watching over me." (The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart, Swindoll)

Personally, I am thankful for the encouragement and help I get from other Christians, but nothing does more to encourage me than listening to the testimony of God's faithfulness to His faithful servants. In the early days of my walk with my Savior, Jesus Christ, the Lord made the way for me to listen to a Christian Radio station. On that station was a program, "Stories of Great Christians." My heart rejoiced the whole time as they would read books and share testimonies of God's faithfulness to His servants. The best counsel I get is from those who can Biblically and effectively share God's faithfulness.

In Closing: *In this Thanksgiving Season, do not over indulge in the world view of celebration.* There is nothing wrong with taking time to enjoy all the food, family and other privileges available this Thanksgiving Day. However, the key to beating the depression and unfulfillment that is so common during the Holiday Season is to say, "Thanks to God at Thanksgiving." We say thanks, by singing to Him, praying to Him, giving to Him, and testifying about His faithfulness."