

November 20, 2016
Sunday Morning Service
Thanksgiving
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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O GIVE THANKS
1 Chronicles 16:1-12

It is the season again already for us to be thankful. A couple of things in our culture have changed recently that might have some effect on thanksgiving this year. For one, politically conservative people are generally breathing a sigh of relief, and might even be thankful, because the moderate candidate was chosen over the very liberal candidate for president. Okay, that is something for which some Americans could be thankful. Or, the fact that several major retailers have chosen to stay closed on Thanksgiving Day this year might make some people feel thankful. Surely the employees who get to stay home and eat a nice dinner as they enjoy their family's company will be thankful. But the shop-aholics who have become accustomed to the mad chaos of Thanksgiving Day shopping might be unthankful.

But is that all there is? Are rare, or annual, or unimportant events all that we can think of to generate thanksgiving in these calloused hearts of ours? What about the real reasons for thanksgiving that we should focus on this time of the year? "Yeah, Yeah" the people say. "We know you're talking about God and religion and America the land of the free and home of the brave, with its penchant for baseball, hotdogs, apple pie, and grandmas."

Okay, it is unlikely that we are going to convince the carefree sinner, or the agnostic, or the atheist, that there are deeper and more significant reasons for our thanksgiving. But, we are God's people. Most of the folks who gather in an assembly like this are people who have come to realize that they are sinners whose sin offended their Creator greatly. We have acknowledged that sin, calling it what it is—an offense to the Holy God, our Creator. We have acknowledged

that we deserve eternal punishment in hell with Satan and his demons. We have also embraced by faith the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to cover over the offense of our sins. We have gladly accepted our Creator's forgiveness. We live with an eye on eternity, longing for our eternal life in the presence of our good and gracious Creator.

Now really, isn't that something worthy of our thanksgiving? Comparing a new pair of shoes, or a new car, or even a new president with the promise of eternal life is rather foolish. Eternity is huge. Eternity is scary. The certainty of eternity in the presence of our loving God is something that should draw thanksgiving out of the people who possess that certainty. But how often do we think about this wonderful blessing? How often do we give thanks to God for His mighty works in our life?

When King David and the people brought the Ark of the true God into the tent David had set up in Jerusalem, he and the people were very thankful. Why were they thankful, and what did that expression of thanks sound like? There are some good and important lessons in this story for us who would be thankful people.

The Setting of Thanksgiving (vv.1-6).

This text opens with the statement that David and the thankful people brought in the ark of God. *And they brought in the ark of God and set it inside the tent that David had pitched for it (v.1a)*. The natural question generated by this statement is "brought it in from where?" We studied that part of the story recently in our series through 1 and 2 Samuel.

The people brought in the ark after God reminded His people that He is holy. The fact that the ark symbolized God's presence had slipped everyone's mind for a bit. This was a very important object – a very important piece of furniture. At the founding of the nation of Israel, God promised to meet with His people at the mercy seat between the cherubim that covered the ark (Exodus 25:22). It was no small matter that the Creator of all things and all people, who does not live in houses built by men's hands, condescended to meet with His people in spirit at that place.

Therefore, because this symbolism was so significant, God attached serious restrictions to the handling of and attitude toward the

ark. Only men who were part of the Kohathites, a particular family within the tribe of Levi, were to care for the ark (Numbers 10:20). They were to transport it by two poles and cover it with multiple animal skins while they carried it (Numbers 4:4-6).

God's people forgot all that for a moment. It seemed a lot easier and more convenient to just set the ark of God on a cart and transport it like the Philistines had done many years before. The two fellows driving the cart were very familiar with the ark since it had been in their house probably from the time they were born. David and the people were really sincere about their desire to put the ark in the city of David. Surely God is satisfied when we are familiar with His things and sincere about His work. Yes, but God requires more than familiarity and sincerity. God requires respect for His holy character.

God reminded David and the people in a forceful way that the ark represented Him. The ox cart hit a bump and the ark began to tip. As the ark tipped, Uzzah reached out to steady it. That seemed like the right thing to do. It wasn't. God immediately killed the sincere man. Everyone was shocked. Suddenly everyone had to reevaluate their relationship with God.

That bit of background in the context of this story about giving of thanks reminds us that thanksgiving becomes trite and meaningless if we disrespect the revelations God has given us about Himself. Our holiday of Thanksgiving is a good time to reevaluate our opinion of God. If we are truly God's people and He is truly our Master, how long will He tolerate our slighting Him? Let's stop to consider if possibly our thanksgiving to God is shallow and meaningless based on what we know about God. For the true child of God to worship God slightly, worship with mere words, is to risk correction and discipline from the holy God.

All of that was in the past for David and his people. They had come to grips with God's holy character. Now, a few months later, it was a time for rejoicing as they moved the ark. David and the people showed respect for God in the way they moved the ark. This time the Levites carried the ark (1 Chronicles 15:26). While the Levites carried the ark, the people worshiped and sang praise to God.

They taught us that proper respect for God affords a clear conscience for thanksgiving. The better we understand God and the more we conform our response to His character, the more likely we

are to have genuine thanks. Because these people had experienced God's power in a devastating way, they were able to express pure thanksgiving. God desires to use the difficulties and trials in our lives to refine our understanding of Him. Doesn't it stand to reason that people who have learned that God's grace is sufficient in times of need will be genuinely thankful?

Those ancient people of God were thankful and they proved it as they offered sacrifices and praise to God. According to our text, it was a time of significant sacrifice. *And they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before God. And when David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD and distributed to all Israel, both men and women, to each a loaf of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins (vv.1b-3).*

The Levites were in charge of offering the sacrifices. The specific offerings mentioned here focused on a right relationship with God. For example, the burnt offering was the most common sacrifice in the Mosaic law system. God's law required the priests to offer this kind of offering on the altar each morning and evening. But other people could bring this kind of offering to the tabernacle for the priests to offer it. The individual offered this sacrifice as a symbol of expiation of sin. In that sense, the burnt offering symbolized well what the sacrifice of Christ accomplished for us – the removal of our sin and the guilt that accompanies it.

It was also true that the burnt offering expressed thanksgiving. When people offered a burnt offering for thanksgiving, they offered sacrifices that focused on God's redemptive work and their offering was an expression of thanksgiving because of it. So, too, our sacrifices of praise should exalt God because He has forgiven our sins, and we are very thankful for that, right? Each time we gather for worship, our praise and thanksgiving for God paying for our sins should not only be obvious but should be central.

Notice that the people also offered peace offerings. The peace offering expressed the assurance of peace with God. The word for the offering is the same as the Hebrew greeting, "Shalom" (peace). A person could offer a peace offering to celebrate peace with an adversary. But generally a person made this sacrifice as a reminder

that he has peace with God. This too is what the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross won for us. Our worship is not an attempt to gain peace with God, but a joyous expression of thanksgiving because God already offers us peace through Jesus Christ.

Bringing the symbol of God's presence to Jerusalem was a time for singing and praising God. *Then he appointed some of the Levites as ministers before the ark of the LORD, to invoke, to thank, and to praise the LORD, the God of Israel. Asaph was the chief, and second to him were Zechariah, Jeiel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Mattithiah, Eliab, Benaiah, Obed-edom, and Jeiel, who were to play harps and lyres; Asaph was to sound the cymbals, and Benaiah and Jahaziel the priests were to blow trumpets regularly before the ark of the covenant of God (vv.4-6).*

In these verses we read that the king assigned some people to minister before the ark. What were they to do? They were *to invoke their God* (v.4). The Hebrew word for invoke means to remember, to call to mind. The leaders of that thanksgiving service gave testimony to help people remember the mighty works of God.

Second, David appointed the leaders *to thank their God* (v.4). If we call to mind what God has done, we should then be thankful. To hear others (like the worship leaders) express thanksgiving to God encourages us to be thankful also.

Third, the leaders were to *praise their God* (v.4). The word behind the English *praise* means to lift up or boast about. It is the Hebrew word *halel* which you might recognize as the title given to Psalms 113-118. The devout Israelites still sing these psalms in connection with the Passover celebration. All of those psalms recall God's mighty work of delivering His people from bondage in Egypt.

The scene might actually look rather common with the praise and worship leaders directing the people in offering thanksgiving to God. Oh, these were professional thanks-givers? Yes, we have those too, right? We call them preachers or pastors or ministers of music or praise and worship leaders. They are responsible to do the worship and thanksgiving for the church. But, the reality in both that ancient setting and our setting is that everyone is supposed to praise God and give thanks. The leaders simply inspire us to do it.

One of the important leaders who David appointed was Asaph. We are somewhat familiar with Asaph who was a choir director who

wrote several of the Psalms. Here he is identified as the cymbal player. *The singers, Heman, Asaph, and Ethan, were to sound bronze cymbals" (1 Chronicles 15:19).* David established Asaph and these men as the leaders of the music department of the palace and kingdom for the express purpose of leading in corporate thanksgiving to God (1 Chronicles 25:1). We are quite certain that Asaph wrote Psalms 50, 73, 74, 75, 80, 81, 82, and 83 which are all songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. Even after the exile to Babylon, when the people were repatriated to Jerusalem, the relatives of these appointed leaders took up leading in corporate thanksgiving (Nehemiah 11:17).

This praise and expression of thanksgiving was supposed to take place regularly. If we are familiar with God's holy character and God's mighty work in our behalf, we should have regular expressions of thanksgiving. If the only time we think about being thankful to God is during a national holiday that was once set apart for that express reason, it is very possible that our thanksgiving is insincere. "Well, maybe. But for what should we be thankful?" Maybe ignorance is part of the problem.

The Content of Thanksgiving (vv.7-12).

On that special occasion, David made an appointment for thanksgiving. *Then on that day David first appointed that thanksgiving be sung to the LORD by Asaph and his brothers* (v.7). This is an interesting situation knowing that David himself was a musician. He understood how music affects the human soul. He experienced the outpouring of thankfulness through music. He knew that when Asaph and the musicians led in corporate thanksgiving, the rest of the people would be encouraged to lift their voices in praise to God. It almost seems that we should pity the people of God who are afraid to express thanks to Him through music. Then again, there might be times when we experience conflict in our souls if we wonder if the music is really thanksgiving to God or just an expression of a warm, fuzzy feeling on our part.

As a musician David wrote many songs of thanksgiving to the Lord. He should have known something about what it takes to praise and thank God. At least 73 of the psalms in the Bible collection of psalms are traditionally attributed to David. The Dead Sea scrolls

attribute 3,600 other songs to him, but there is some debate about the accuracy of this conclusion. No doubt David wrote a lot of songs and nearly all of the ones included in the Bible offer thanks to God for something. David wrote, “I will give to the LORD the thanks due to his righteousness, and I will sing praise to the name of the LORD, the Most High” (Psalm 7:17). “I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart; I will recount all of your wonderful deeds” (Psalm 9:1). “The LORD is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him” (Psalm 28:7). “Sing praises to the LORD, O you his saints, and give thanks to his holy name” (Psalm 30:4). “Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre; make melody to him with the harp of ten strings!” (Psalm 33:2).

But what does serious thanksgiving to God look like for us? It probably looks much like it did for David and his peers. Our text ends with about six conclusions of a truly thankful heart (vv.8-12).

First, we will thank the LORD. *Oh give thanks to the LORD (v.8a)*. Thankfulness requires understanding of activity. For what are you thankful? What exactly happened that makes us think we should be thankful? Identify it. As we identify the reason for thankfulness, we will discover that God is in it. Thankfulness requires knowledge of God who is active. Was this event for which you are thankful a coincidence or was it the direct intervention of God?

To that end, the redeemed saint is fully convinced that God is the God of salvation. We know that He alone has saved us from the penalty of our sins. We know that He saves us for His glory. We are thankful. Once we realize God’s active intervention in our own lives, we begin to see that God is active everywhere. And we are thankful for all that we can ascertain of God’s work, and especially thankful for particular works of God.

Second, when we are thankful, we pray to the LORD. *Call upon his name (v.8b)*. If we are thankful, we should tell God. Granted, the omniscient God knows our thoughts. But God loves the expressions of our hearts that reveal our love for Him, our recognition of His works, and our thanksgiving because of it.

Third, thankful people testify about the LORD. The text says that *we make known his deeds among the peoples (v.8c)*! This requires that we not only think thankful thoughts, but we express our

thanksgiving to God vocally. In real terms it means that if we are truly thankful, we will tell other people about God. That is exactly what David stated later on in this prayer: *Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and he is to be held in awe above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the LORD made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and joy are in his place (vv.24-28)*.

To declare something requires that we talk. Most of us can talk to other people quite freely about any number of things. Why don’t we talk to other people about God’s work if we are cognizant of that work and thankful for it?

We might accomplish the same thing by singing publicly. David said, *Sing to him; sing praises to him (v.9a)*. Later he said, *Sing to the LORD, all the earth! Tell of his salvation from day to day (v.23)*. A great way to say “Thanks” to God is through singing. Many of our hymns and gospel songs are thorough expressions of thanksgiving for God’s salvation, God’s grace, God’s care for us. It is good for us to focus little on the tune and focus much on the message of thanksgiving we are singing. I often think that “Amazing Grace” is so popular in the fickle, selfish world simply because it is a catchy tune. Surely the vast majority of people who sing the song, or want to hear it played, have no idea how wonderful God’s amazing grace is that saves a wretch like me!

The most obvious way that we testify of the Lord is to talk about Him. We need to *Tell of all his wondrous works (v.9b)*! In the Bible belt most people find it rather easy to talk about their church. Let’s talk to others instead about God’s wondrous works. We should be able to find many opportunities in everyday conversation to say something about God’s work in creation, God’s work in control of world events, God’s work of salvation, and especially in God’s supply of sufficient grace to us every day.

Fourth, we express thanksgiving when we rejoice in the LORD. *Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice (v.10)*! Being sad, or agitated, or discouraged, or even angry is very natural and easy. What can change that natural attitude? We each are responsible to refocus. When we feel discouraged, we need to seek the Lord and rejoice. Thinking about and talking about God’s

glory ought to cause us to rejoice. We should be known as people who, *Ascribe to the LORD, O clans of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength! Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering and come before him! Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth; yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved (vv.28-30).*

Fifth, a great way to show thankfulness to the LORD is to depend on Him. *Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually (v.11)!* David reminded his peers, *When you were few in number, and of little account, and sojourners in it, wandering from nation to nation, from one kingdom to another people, he allowed no one to oppress them; he rebuked kings on their account (vv.19-21).* People who recognize that they are few, weak, and wandering are more likely to depend on God. When we see ourselves as weak and vulnerable, we are more likely to depend on the Lord. Through dependance on the Lord, we realize how thankful we should be. Self-made men and women are generally proud not thankful.

Sixth, we are more likely to be thankful when we think about the LORD. *Remember the wondrous works that he has done, his miracles and the judgments he uttered (v.12).* It is good to read the Bible and meditate on God's works in the past. It is good to read the Bible and meditate on God's work in your life today. It is good to read the Bible and meditate on God's promises for the future. That kind of remembering will make us thankful.

Consider that David called on the people to remember their covenant with God. *O offspring of Israel his servant, sons of Jacob, his chosen ones! He is the LORD our God; his judgments are in all the earth. Remember his covenant forever, the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations, the covenant that he made with Abraham, his sworn promise to Isaac, which he confirmed as a statute to Jacob, as an everlasting covenant to Israel, saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan, as your portion for an inheritance" (vv.13-18).*

Israel had the promise of a land. That was God's covenant for them. We have something better than a piece of property promised to us. We too have a covenant God has given us. Born again believers have the promise of everlasting life. Because God is always true to His promises, we have great reasons to be thankful.

If we are just typical Americans, we have much for which to be thankful. Because we are more than just Americans, but citizens of the heavenly kingdom through God's grace, we have over-abundant reasons to be thankful.