

“A Song For Thanksgiving 2020” Psalm 33 Shane Hatfield 11/22/20

Good evening, Ethos! My name is Shane Hatfield. I'm the senior pastor here. I will soon start full time, at the beginning of January, and it's so exciting to be with you this evening. I've been practicing saying this evening because I've said 'this morning' already three times today, and it's not the morning, it's the evening! And so, we're here to worship Jesus. We've got nursery care for our children right now, if you have 0-3-year-olds you can send them back with Miss Julie, back to the nursery and they will care for them during the sermon and you can get them afterward. Everyone else, you're stuck with me, sorry, you've got to be in here. I believe for the young ones we do have some crayons in the back. Are there some crayons back there, Steve? Yeah, there are crayons back in the lobby that you can grab so you can color while the sermon is going on.

If you're a visitor, thank you so much for coming to worship with us this evening. One of our elders, Daniel, once said that he wants Ethos to be a place of rest and refuge. So, if you're a visitor tonight and you're looking for a place of rest and refuge, we hope that you've come to the right place. We believe that we can receive Jesus and rest in Him, and that God can be our refuge through Jesus Christ. So, no matter where you are on the spectrum of your beliefs or your faith, we're glad that you're here tonight and we hope that you can come and rest with us.

This evening, we're going to look at Psalm 33, so if you've got a Bible or a Bible app you can open it up there. We should have it back on the screen as well. The title of tonight's sermon is "A Song for Thanksgiving 2020." As I was preparing for this sermon, I thought to myself, "You know, I don't know that I know any Thanksgiving songs." So, I googled Thanksgiving songs, and how nice it was of Ben Rector to come out with a Thanksgiving song a few weeks ago so I could use it for my sermon. I thought, I'm going to listen to this, so here are the lyrics to "Thanksgiving Song" by Ben Rector. This is what he says: "Familiar highways lined with leaves turned brown, making my way back into my hometown. Funny how this all looks different, but it feels the same. Like how life never stops changing but some things never change. So fill your plate and fill your drink and fill this house with family, the kind of love that all these years can't wash away. 'Cause the older that I get I see that life is short and bittersweet. Thank God for this Thanksgiving Day. Watching football, watching families grow. The old kid's table all have kids of their own. Starting to see my grandfather in my nephew's eyes, Mom still can't talk about him and not almost cry. So fill your plate and fill your drink and fill this house with family, the kind of love a thousand miles can't wash away. 'Cause the older that I get I see that life is short and bittersweet. Thank God for this Thanksgiving Day." Now, it's Ben Rector so of course it was a pretty good song, but I couldn't help but catch the irony and feel a tinge of cynicism that in 2020 he's releasing a song about the joys of Thanksgiving day and I thought, but what if you can't return home to see your family this year? Or what if you sit down for that family meal and it's like the one millionth hour you've been stuck together for that week and it's not quite so peaceful and you're not quite as patient and loving and kind and thankful as you would like to be? Or what if you've had a pretty decent Thanksgiving, or you've had a pretty decent 2020 and you have a lot of reasons to be thankful, but you just can't help waiting for the other shoe to drop, and you think, 'Ah, at some point, something bad is going to happen.' How can we be thankful then?

That's what I want to talk about tonight. How do we celebrate Thanksgiving when we don't feel thankful? How do we celebrate Thanksgiving in 2020, a year filled with confusion, frustration, and suffering caused by a global pandemic, an erratic economy, and a contentious

election, piled on top of all the normal sin and suffering that we experience in this life? Well, whenever we have times like this, thanks to God's grace, we can turn, not to Ben Rector, but to the Psalms. One theologian said that the Psalms are important because while most of Scripture speaks to us, the Psalms speak for us. Down the centuries, the people of God have found in the Psalms the language of praise and complaint, trust and doubt, petition and thanks, which has nourished their relationship with God. So, this evening, as we gather together, we're going to meditate on Psalm 33. And I pray that it will move us to praise God and thank Him, even if we don't feel thankful this year. We're going to look at three things. We're going to look at a call to thanksgiving, three reasons to be thankful, and then a prayer for thanksgiving.

So, the first thing we're going to look at is a call to thanksgiving in this passage. Psalm 33 begins with a call to thanksgiving. Let's look at the first four verses, we read those earlier. ¹"Shout for joy in the LORD, O you righteous! Praise befits the upright. ² Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre; make melody to him with the harp of ten strings! ³ Sing to him a new song; play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts. For the word of the LORD is upright, and all his work is done in faithfulness." In these four verses, we have several commands to sing! It says, "shout for joy," "give thanks," "make melody," "sing and play." Why? Because "praise befits the upright"! For that which is upright and good, it is right to praise it. And what is more upright and good in this entire universe than the Lord? It is right to give Him praise, and to thank Him for all of His goodness and kindness to us! And it's also right for us to praise Him because He is an upright God and He has made us His people, and it is right to thank Him, to praise Him. That's who we are, and that's how He has created us to be.

Now, sidenote, Charlie, if anybody ever asks why we use instruments in worship, just reference this verse. Right? These three verses right here. It tells us, right, that we're going to use our instruments to praise the Lord and if anybody ever asks me why I don't play in the band, it's because I don't play skillfully! It says, "play skillfully," and I have no musical skills! But I can't get away from making a joyful noise, I can sing loudly to the Lord, and so can all of you and so, we can praise God and thank Him! We can give Him praise and thanks, even when we don't feel thankful. Now, I think it's a little hard for us in our culture to thank God when we don't feel thankful, because we place such a high priority on our feelings, and we want to express our feelings with honesty and authenticity. The spirit of our age is sort of that whatever we feel, that's what's right, and we don't want to repress our feelings, we don't want to condemn them, we don't want to withhold them. We want to express how we feel and to correct my feelings might be repressive or inauthentic or dishonest. And as we move into this, if that's the way you're feeling, then I just want to give you a few reasons why I think even if we don't feel thankful, we can still practice thankfulness.

The first one is this: our feelings are fickle. Our feelings are fickle. We can be as happy as a lark one minute and as angry as the Grinch the next minute, and not know why we went from one emotion to the other! So, if we always just expressed our emotions, then we would be emotionally unstable. At least I know I would be, right? But we can't always just express our feelings all the time no matter what. There's got to be some boundaries on them. And the second reason is this, the Scriptures want us to live with honesty and integrity, but the Scriptures nowhere teach that our feelings are the ultimate measure of truth. Our feelings are good and they're valuable and they're important; they're a gift from God. But they don't determine the truth. God determines the truth and our struggle as humans is to orient our feelings around God's truth. And so, what happens is the Scripture comes in and it corrects our feelings without minimizing them or dismissing them, but it helps us to align our feelings with the truth about

God's word and His creation. So, 2020's been hard, right? It's been a year of hard. It's been a year of suffering and so, what I don't want to do here is minimize our suffering or dismiss it or neglect it. I want to honor it, but say, let's let the Scriptures shape our feelings and drive our feelings and form them around God's truth.

So, what Psalm 33 does is it gives us three reasons to be thankful, three reasons for thanksgiving. The first one is this: the Psalmist praises God for the faithfulness of His creation. He praises God for the faithfulness of His creation. Let's look at verses 5-9: "⁵ He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD. ⁶ By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host. ⁷ He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap; he puts the deeps in storehouses. ⁸ Let all the earth fear the LORD; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him! ⁹ For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm." So, the language of these verses points us back to Genesis 2 where we read that God created the heavens and the earth and all the creatures it contains with the word of His mouth. He spoke and it came into existence. Not only did He create this creation, He created it with order and organization and stability and beauty. He created a world that would operate faithfully and stably for us to be in it so He could be our God and we could be His people. And it is right to give Him awe and praise and reverence for His creation. I think that His love and faithfulness are woven into the very fabric of creation and even now in the midst of a pandemic we can still see hints of that today. Despite our sin and our misery over the last nine months, the sun has still risen and gone down every day. The moon and the stars are still in the sky. The planets still orbit the sun. The seasons have changed, and we're about to celebrate Thanksgiving, which is a holiday that celebrates the harvest and the harvest may be smaller this year and it may have come through more toil, but the harvest is still coming in. There's a faithfulness to creation that we can celebrate even in the midst of our sufferings.

This passage reminded me of the story of Corrie Ten Boom. Corrie Ten Boom was arrested by the Gestapo during World War 2 for helping rescue Jews and her and her sister were taken into a concentration camp. While they were there, they would worship at night and when they would start to worship, they were always surprised that the Gestapo never stopped them! They never came in and broke it up. They never came in and checked on them. They could never figure out why. Well one day, her sister went to ask her supervisor a question and the supervisor wouldn't come near the cell because of the fleas in their cell, and it dawned on her sister that the reason they would never break up their worship at night was because of the fleas. And her sister said, "We need to praise God, and thank Him for the fleas." God's creation is so good and so well ordered, and so beautiful, that even the fleas can lead us to praise Him and glorify Him. So right now, as we strive, as we long and we try to be thankful during a time of Thanksgiving, I think we can thank the Lord for the faithfulness of His creation.

Now, as we go through this, I kind of want to drop in a few practical applications for COVID, because here's the reality: I think we could be in for a long winter. I think it's going to be hard, okay, and I think we need to prepare ourselves for that, and I think that one of the things we need to do for that is realize that it's vital in our daily lives that we honor the rhythms of creation. God created us for rest, and He created us for work. So no matter what your schedule is right now, it might be kind of topsy turvy, you've got to make sure that you get good sleep at night and you've got to make sure that you set aside time to do your work, right? There's got to be times for work and rest. There's got to be times for exercising our mind and our souls and our bodies, right? Make sure that you're taking care of your mind, your body and your soul. Don't neglect those areas. We need to find creative ways for recreation and fellowship. We need

relationships and there are going to be limitations placed around that. Like right now our Ethos Groups can't even gather together, but they can meet online or there may be some days where there's good weather and people can go out to the parks and social distance and wear masks and those sorts of things, but we've got to continue to find ways to be together, because that's how God has wired us. It's in the very fabric of the way that we're created. We were created for order, not for chaos, and so, we've got to continue to build that into our schedule, and that's a way that we can praise God and thank Him for the way that we're created. So, the first thing is we can give thanks for the faithfulness of God's creation.

The second is we can thank God for the faithfulness of His plan. Look at verses 10-12: "The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples. ¹¹ The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations. ¹² Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage!" Even though we can't see it, God has a plan and a purpose for the history of all mankind. And He is working that plan and that purpose out and all things, all things, work for good for His people. Now, I'm not sure that there are verses in the Bible that summarize my frustration with 2020 more than these verses right here.

I love to plan. I love goal setting. I love planning. Every year I sit down at the beginning of the year and I map out my goals for my work and for my family and for myself for the year, and then I plan out all my events on a schedule. And then every day I try to sit down, and I try to map out how my daily actions are going to contribute to reaching those goals. By the time I got to April in 2020, I was ready to throw my calendar out the window. All my plans were destroyed. All my plans were frustrated. Shari and I sat down in April to start planning for April and I have this little section in my calendar, I paid way too much for this swanky calendar that now is worthless, right? But I'm looking and it has a little section for your plans and your projects for each month and I look at it and I have nothing. And I look down at Shari and I'm like, "The Lord has frustrated all my plans. I've got nothing for the entire month." My plans may have been frustrated, but His plans were not. Our plans may have been frustrated, but His plans were not.

I bet I'm not the only one who had some frustrated plans this year, right? We had weddings and graduations and birthday parties and adoptions and funerals and sports events and job opportunities that were frustrated, that were changed. We experienced disappointment, loss and suffering. And that was hard. But in the midst of that, God had a plan. And His plan was carried out and His desires were carried out. His will was done, and we know that that's good because we see how His plan was carried out on the cross. The cross. The most horrible, horrific, tragic suffering in all the history of mankind. God had a purpose and a plan even for that. Consider what Acts 2:22-23 says. It says, "²² "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— ²³ this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men." God had a plan and a purpose even for the sacrificial death of His one and only Son. If God had a plan and a purpose for that suffering, then He must have a plan and a purpose for our suffering right now and we may not know what it is, but we know that He is good, and we know that we can trust Him. So, God may have frustrated our plans, but I think we have the opportunity to sit back and look in the mist of our frustration and go, what is God doing? How can God be opening my heart up for something new and different? Even if it's not what I expected. Maybe He's giving us more time with our families. Maybe He's destroyed our idols that we were putting so

much trust in. Maybe He has shown us new ways to work and to worship. We need to ask ourselves, how is God at work in our frustrated plans? We've got to continue to plan and set goals, that's how God created us. So even during the pandemic, we don't know what's going to happen with 2021, but it's good for us to go ahead and set plans and goals, but we've got to hold them openhanded, realizing that God may have other plans. And we need to learn to be flexible and to adapt. But at the end of the day, we can trust the Lord with our plans because we know that He is good, and He loves us.

So, we can thank God for His faithful plan, we can thank God for His faithful creation, and we can thank God for His faithful salvation. Look at verses 13-19: ¹³ "The LORD looks down from heaven; he sees all the children of man; ¹⁴ from where he sits enthroned he looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth, ¹⁵ he who fashions the hearts of them all and observes all their deeds. ¹⁶ The king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength. ¹⁷ The war horse is a false hope for salvation, and by its great might it cannot rescue. ¹⁸ Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love, ¹⁹ that he may deliver their soul from death and keep them alive in famine." God is not a distant clockmaker. He did not create this world, twist the key, get all the pieces going, and then take His hands off of it and leave it to run. He is a good Father who is present and caring and active in everything that is happening in this world. He is all-knowing. He is all-powerful, and He is all-present. He knows our hearts because He intimately fashioned and formed them and shaped them. And those who trust Him rely on His strength and have the hope of His salvation. And what this passage tells us is that when we put our hope in other things, they're going to fail us and they're going to disappoint us, but the Lord will deliver us, the Lord will preserve us and He will save us. No matter where 2020 has taken us and no matter where 2021 goes, we are never going to be out of the eyesight of our heavenly Father, and we will never be out of His reach.

This week as I was reading some news articles, I saw one of those random articles that just pops up, I want to know how they decide how they send you the random articles. I got a random article that said, "Gorilla Cares for Injured Bird in a Cage." And I was like, I've got to click on that! I've got to see what that says. So, I clicked on this article and it's this really sweet video of this monstrous, strong gorilla who sees an injured bird in his pen, in his cage, and what does he do? He walks up to that injured bird, he starts nudging it, he starts caressing it, and he even like tried to help it fly. I just thought, what a great picture of how God cares for His creation. This all-powerful, omnipotent Lord of space, time and dimension, He's got these helpless, weak, bruised and battered people, and what does He do? He comes up, and He cares for them. He's gentle with them. He nudges them. He tries to lift them up and help them fly again. It's even more intimate than that. On the same article they tagged another video of a mother gorilla who had just had a baby gorilla, and moments after the birth the mother gorilla was holding the baby gorilla right here, just gazing at it, licking the afterbirth off of the baby. I just thought, what tender loving care. That's the way our heavenly Father looks at us, with tender loving kindness and care to preserve us and to give us exactly what we need.

During times like this when we feel our smallness and our weakness and our fragility, what we instantly want to do is we want to look to other things to deliver us, right? We want to look to the government, or we want to look to alcohol, or we want to look to friends and family, or we want to look on the internet. We want to look to money. We want to look to power. To all these other things and Psalm 33 tells us that there's nothing else that can save us. They're all a false hope and whenever they let us down, we can't cope. Neurobiologist Kurt Thompson said that in these moments, all of our coping mechanisms are taken away. All of our false forms of

salvation are removed, and we are laid bare and that's when we begin to see our true selves. Have you seen your true self over the last nine months? Have you seen it come out? Have you seen it come out in impatience, in unkindness, in unrighteousness, in frustration, in anger? Well here's the good news of the gospel: The Lord saw it too. And Jesus didn't die for the pretend you that never gets angry and never sins and never gets impatient and always manages money well and never over-drinks. The Lord died for the real you that actually does those things. And the goodness of the gospel is that in those moments when He meets us with His grace and kindness to rescue us from our sin, to show us that yes, we're much more sinful and broken than we ever imagined, but we're much more loved and accepted in Christ than we ever dared to hope. We see God's faithfulness in His salvation that saves us every day, moment by moment, from our sin and misery, and from the sin and misery of this world.

Psalm 33 gives us three reasons to thank God, even when we're not thankful, because of the faithfulness of His creation, because of the faithfulness of His plan, and because of the faithfulness of His salvation, and as we meditate on that, it leads us to praise God and to pray this final prayer of thanksgiving that the Psalmist gives us. Look at verses 20-22: "20 Our soul waits for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. 21 For our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name. 22 Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us, even as we hope in you." Let's make that our prayer this week. Let's make that our prayer, right? We thank God for His faithfulness and as we pray this and as we see His faithfulness, that gives us the patience and the confidence and the buoyance to live stable, hopeful lives, despite our circumstances. Because we don't trust our fickle feelings, we trust in a faithful God that loves us and cares for us, and that meets us there, and that gives us hope.

I once heard a sermon by a guy named Brian Habig, he tells a story about a friend of his who was in New York City not long after 9/11, and he was in a subway, and while he was in a subway, the electricity went out all over the city. And of course everybody screamed, they were panicked, they were scared. So eventually, everybody filed out of the subway and thought it was another attack, so they file out of the subway, they come outside, they come into the city, all the lights are out, they're all scared, they don't know what's going on. Many of them were heading to Brooklyn, so as they're heading to Brooklyn, they decide they're going to walk over the Brooklyn Bridge. So he's walking over the Brooklyn Bridge with this mass of people who are calling their friends and family trying to figure out what's going on and the whole time he got more and more tense, he got more and more scared and eventually, he thought to himself, this is it. This is the terrorist plan. They've turned off the electricity so we would all come out of the subway and walk across the bridge, and they're going to blow up the bridge. And right then, in that moment of anxiety and fear and chaos, he hears someone in heels walking behind him. And as this person gets closer and closer to him, he hears her in a deep, strong beautiful gospel voice begin to sing and she starts singing a song that says, "Let me tell you about my Jesus." And the next thing he knew, he was grabbing her hand. He held her hand and walked across the Brooklyn Bridge as she sang, "Let me tell you about my Jesus." And he said it was in that moment that he knew everything was going to be okay.

In a world of chaos and confusion and uncertainty, we know that everything is going to be okay because of Jesus. Because we look at the cross and we see a God who loves us so much that He gave His only Son for us. And if He loves us so much that He gave His only Son for us, how will He not also give us all things? How will He not also take care of us and our families and our nation and our children? That leads us to sing. That leads us to praise. That leads us to thankfulness. We begin to form and shape our feelings, not around the fickleness of themselves,

but around a God who is faithful, who loves us and cares for us. So, let's take a few minutes to pray together that Psalm 33 would lead us into thankfulness this week, and that it would give us the stability that we need to take on whatever happens in the rest of 2020 and in the future. Let's pray together.