

Finding Joy in Thankfulness

Shaped by the Psalms / Psalm 30

Introduction:

As we approach Thanksgiving, we often find encouragement to recount things to be thankful for in our lives. This may include a specific time at our family's thanksgiving meals where each person shares one thing they are thankful for, like my family did growing up. It is fitting, then, to have our "Shaped by the Psalms" series lead us to consider Psalms of Thanksgiving. Now, I know this season can be a sorrowful reminder of the loss of loved ones for some, and not everyone is in a place of thanksgiving this morning. Let me start by saying that I am praying for you this week as you experience the grief of those losses. May God meet you in His presence with the comfort He provides. Thanksgiving psalms are important for us to consider, as they teach us how the proper response to God's work in our lives is one of giving thanks as a form of praise. These psalms, like others, provide examples of individual thanksgiving, like Psalm 34, and corporate thanksgiving, like Psalm 107. They typically hold similar elements or movements, including praise to God for hearing and helping, a summons for others to join in worship over its testimony, a description or confession of their need and appeal to God, and an expression or vow of thanksgiving and praise in response to God's answer. One could make the case that many thanksgiving psalms have a direct connection to other psalms with prayers for help, as James Luther Mays notes in his commentary, "prayers for help anticipate the prayer of thanksgiving. Its praise completes and consummates what was begun in supplication" (James Luther Mays, Psalms, 140). These types of psalms shape our thoughts, actions, worship, and prayers by reminding us to turn to God for help and moving us to respond to His loving answers in thanksgiving and praise. Psalm 30 is our passage for today, and it can be broken up into two stanzas with two parts in each stanza. It begins and ends with a commitment to thanksgiving and praise and includes a consistent refrain of joy and gladness, revealing how to find joy in thankfulness. Let's consider what each stanza teaches us about finding joy in thankfulness, starting in verse 1-5, showing us that,

Joy in Thankfulness Flows from the Heart of the Redeemed

Before we dive in, let me say a brief word about the title, which says "A Psalm of David. A Song at the dedication of the Temple." Translators are divided over whether the word "temple" should be translated "house" or "temple." Some say it should be "house" because David wasn't around for the dedication of the Temple. Others say David could have written it in anticipation of the Temple dedication, or the title could signify it was used for that occasion. It becomes a slightly more peculiar title when we notice the psalm is quite individualistic. Yet, I believe the importance of it being a song of dedication of either David's house or the Temple will become clear as we hear its major refrain. With that said, let's dive in. Look at the way it opens in verse 1, "I will extol you, O Lord, for you have drawn me up and have not let my foes rejoice over me." To extol carries the idea of a proclamation of exaltation. This shows us that our thanksgiving should not be an internal reflection of the heart only, but a verbal proclamation. When David begins to share why he will extol the Lord, he uses a word for "drawn" that gives the imagery of pulling up a bucket from a deep well. David also says the Lord hasn't let his enemies gloat over his misfortune. God has provided help from something serious. Continue in verses 2-3, "O Lord my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me. O Lord, you have brought up my soul from Sheol; you restored me to life from among those who go down to the pit." Verse 2 begins the first of many patterns of reversal that continue throughout this psalm. David says he cried to God for help, and God healed him. Then he details what he meant by saying he was drawn up, showing that his soul was brought up from Sheol and his life was restored after living like he was among the dead. We will see him expound on this in verses 6-10. The imagery and language suggest he faced a life-threatening sickness, so this reversal for David appears to be God restoring him after experiencing a sickness that put him on death's door. God's healing is the reason for him to extol the Lord, a healing that not only saved him from death, but from the boasting of his enemies.

Notice what this leads him to do next in verses 4-5. David writes, “Sing praises to the Lord, O you his saints, and give thanks to his holy name. For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.” It is not enough for David to extol the Lord alone, but he is moved to call on God’s saints to “sing praises to the Lord,” and “give thanks to his holy name.” David rightfully calls for praise and thanksgiving to our holy God to burst forth from all of His people and gives two truths in that pattern of reversal as reasons for this. The reversal of God’s anger to favor, and of our weeping to joy. God’s anger, he says, is momentary, but favor for a lifetime. So, weeping, as one commentator suggests, may be “the overnight visitor,” but joy will come with the new day (Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72: An Introduction and Commentary*, 146). As David has experienced his own redemption from death’s door, his heart is overwhelmed by the permanence of God’s favor and joy that comes, compared to the momentary anger of God and weeping we experience. Church, hang on these words, God’s favor is for a lifetime and, though weeping may come at times, joy will be the final result. This is because our redemption, like David’s, has brought us from death to life. Ephesians 2 tells us we were dead in our trespasses and sins. We lived “among those who go down to the pit,” were without hope and “by nature children of wrath,” as God’s anger burned towards our sin. Yet, Christ suffered the wrath of God for us on the cross. And in doing so, He purchased our pardon and God made us alive with Christ so that we would experience the “immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.” This means that all who trust in Him are now God’s saints who can sing praises and give thanks, knowing that any weeping we experience will only tarry for the night, and joy will always come with the dawn. Now, notice how these are reasons for the saints to give thanks to God, suggesting the anger of God was something directed towards David, and His people at times as well. Could that really be what he intends here? The answer to that question comes from the second stanza. Consider with me what the next stanza teaches us about finding joy in thankfulness, in verse 6-10, showing us that,

Joy in Thankfulness Comes from Humble Cries for Mercy

Verses 6-10 reveal how David’s sin led to his need for the Lord to help him and heal him, showing why he expresses that the Lord’s anger lasts but for a moment. Look at verses 6-7, “As for me, I said in my prosperity, ‘I shall never be moved.’ By your favor, O Lord, you made my mountain stand strong; you hid your face; I was dismayed.” David begins by expressing what how, in his prosperity, he was moved to self-confidence that he would never be moved. We recognize this as a sinful boast because of verse 7. In God’s favor, he stood strong, and he was dismayed when the Lord hid His face. The Lord turning His face away shows David’s boast of never being moved was confidence in self and not in the Lord. This is a striking confession in light of what we read in Psalm 10:4 & 6, that says, “In the pride of his face the wicked does not seek him; all his thoughts are, ‘There is no God.’ ... He says in his heart, ‘I shall not be moved; throughout all generations I shall not meet adversity.’” This doesn’t mean that David is fully counted among the wicked, but that his heart was acting in step with them. He had forgotten what caused him to prosper, and, in David’s boasting, the Lord lovingly hid His face from him. Tremper Longman III comments on this well, saying, “although his present testimony affirms God’s blessing, he remembers the fateful time when he presumptuously claimed, I shall never be shaken. God did not let such a brazen claim to independence go unchecked. He redemptively abandoned the psalmist... He turned his presence away from the psalmist. But this move was redemptive, in that the feeling of divine absence caused the wandering psalmist to run back into the arms of God” (Tremper Longman III, *Psalms: An Introduction and Commentary*, 159). Church, there are moments when the Lord moves towards His people in discipline, seeking to expose the sin in their hearts and bring them back to Him. The author of Hebrews reminds us of this in Hebrews 12, verses 5-6 and 11 saying, “And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? ‘My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives... For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.’”

God's continued discipline of sin is designed to train us in righteousness, moving us closer to Him. David recounts that turn in his own heart in verses 8-10. Look there with me, "To you, O Lord, I cry, and to the Lord I plead for mercy: 'What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it tell of your faithfulness? Hear, O Lord, and be merciful to me! O Lord, be my helper!'" As David felt the lack of presence of the Lord, he turned to God with pleas of mercy. Verses 8 and 10 describe these pleas. He cries to the Lord, pleading for mercy, asking God to hear him, be merciful to him, and be his helper. Feel the intensity of his language. Verse 9, then, relays what David based his appeal to God on. He embarks on these series of questions essentially saying his death would mean he would not be able to praise God and tell of His faithfulness. David appealed to how God deserves to be praised and have His faithfulness spread. He cries out for mercy so that he has the opportunity to give thanks and praise God. Notice how that is what happened for David in verses 11-12, "You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever!" David returns to his pattern of reversals. He speaks of how his mourning has turned to dancing, and the replacement of his sackcloth clothes with clothes of gladness. Sackcloth was a traditional garment for mourning or distress. Don't you love the imagery of being clothed with gladness? The overarching purpose of this change is the final pattern of reversal, so that he would not be silent but sing God's praises. God's redemption, His help in David's cries for mercy had the intention of producing worship and praise. So, David concludes rightly saying, "O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever!" Yahweh is His God, His redeemer, and His joy, therefore he will give thanks to God forever. Church, our hearts should thank God forever for His steadfast love shown through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For through it, God has loosed our sackcloth and clothes us with gladness. As we are seeking to have these psalms shape our thoughts, actions, worship, and prayer, I want to end by answering and important question that I see coming from this psalm. How do we continue to encourage our hearts to find joy in thankfulness? First,

1) Remind Your Heart Often of God's Secured Favor

David shows us that joy in thankfulness exists in the heart that knows the Lord's "favor is for a lifetime." We have so much to be thankful for but nothing produces joy in thankfulness like knowing that we who trust in Christ will always experience God's favor, because He sees us through the shed blood of Jesus. The good news of the gospel is not something we should think about only at the moment we turn to God in salvation, but something that we should remind our hearts often of. Trusting in the gospel of Jesus ensures that God's goodness is working towards us, even in our difficulties. When writing to the church in Colossae, whom he never met, Paul starts by recounting his prayer for them, saying this in Colossians 1:11-14, "May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." Paul's prayer this church was for them to be strengthened to endure and remain patient with joy, giving thanks for all that God has secured for them through Christ. We can rightly presume this to be God's heart for us. Reminding our hearts of God's secured favor will strengthen our hearts to find more joy in thankfulness. Next,

2) Humbly Cry Out for God's Continued Mercy

David had been walking with God, as God caused his prosperity. He experienced God's presence and faithfulness but slipped into his sin of self-reliance. We too can experience times in our life where our hearts still battle temptation and we fall into sin. The joy of our salvation is knowing that we can always turn to God and find His loving arms ready to forgive and turn our mourning into dancing. 1 John 1:8-9 says, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Sometimes the hardships we face are due to the ongoing presence of unconfessed sin in our lives. God, in His kindness, may hide his face for a moment to lead our hearts to cry out for mercy and confess our sins. Church, if He hides His face to expose your sin, know that He is always faithful to forgive and cleanse you from it. Humbly cry out to Him for continued mercy and let the ability to do that fill your heart with joy. Finally,

3) Worship The Lord in Thankfulness as He Answers your Prayers

Thanksgiving psalms, like Psalm 30, remind us to respond to all of the good we receive from the hand of God with praise and thanksgiving, especially His mercy towards us. David shows us that our prayers and praise go deeper as they are connected to seeking God for tangible things and humbly receiving His answers. James Luther Mays says it well, "Prayer and praise, if they are to be authentic and vigorous, must have actual life as their subject and not hover carefully in generalities above the earth. Life must be experienced in relation to God, sought and received as from the Lord's hand" (James Luther Mays, Psalms, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, 142). We should consistently be moving our hearts deeper and deeper into praise and thanksgiving because, as we grow in our faith, we move deeper and deeper into our understanding of how many reasons we have to do so, from the mercy of God in salvation to the daily mercies of answered prayers. As the hymn says, "Come Thou fount of every blessing, tune my heart to sing Thy grace. Streams of mercy never ceasing, call for songs of loudest praise" (Robert Robinson, 1758).

Conclusion:

As the worship team and choir are coming up to lead us in an extended time of response, we will begin our time of response in a specific way today. Annually, on the Sunday before Thanksgiving, we encourage our church family to bring a special food offering for the Salvation Army of Lodi's Sally bag ministry. Years ago, we began to make a space in our gatherings to bring those offerings forward and lay them on the stairs as a physical symbol of our sacrifice being for the glory of God. Let me give some pointed encouragement for this time. Church, this is not intended to be an opportunity to show off how giving we are. Rather, this is intended to be a tangible representation of hearts responding to God in thankfulness. As you can see some of these gifts were brought up early. Know that you are not required to bring your food offering up front, and could leave it by the information table if you'd rather do that. However, during the first song, if you are able and desire to, consider physically walking your gift to the front of the stage as a tangible symbol of your heart responding in thankfulness for all God provided you, moving you to help those in need for the sake of His glory. Church, hear me again, we want to guard our hearts from doing this as a show. We desire for this to be a meaningful act, not a forced presentation. We are doing this because there are times when tangible expressions of things can be helpful, think of raise your hands or literally bow down on your knees in worship. So, prayerfully participate if desired, with the goal of speaking to your own heart a call to respond in thanksgiving and praise through this act. The song the worship team and choir will sing is called "The Lord's Prayer (It's Yours)," singing the words Christ taught us to pray, calling our hearts to remember our longing for all things to bring glory to God. Following this song, we will continue to praise and give thanks to God together. As always you are welcome to come and kneel before the Lord in humility, crying out for mercy, or receive prayer from a member of our prayer team who will be worshipping on the front rows or at the bottom of the stairs in the back. Would you pray with me as we lean into God's grace together?