

“Thanksgiving: A Unique Holiday”
Selected Texts
Dr. Harry L. Reeder III
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During this time of Thanksgiving, please know that it’s encouraging to share, to be able to give thanks before the Lord and hopefully you’ll see why as we look at a couple passages of Scripture relating to gratitude. First, we’ll look at Psalm 100. I do hope and pray that you have some kind of a habit of spending time in the Psalms. I think that it’s just invaluable. This is directed at myself as much as anybody else for I am constantly aware that my lack of wisdom is yet my lack of visiting Proverbs and the Psalms, the wisdom literature. If knowing how much wisdom I need and how short I am on it, to be able to come to the Psalms is just a glorious privilege, yet some of us neglect it. Maybe we want to dig in to the doctrinal in the epistles or the history of the Old Testament or the biographies of Jesus with the Gospels, but sometimes we miss this really thoughtful reading, reflection and meditation on the Psalms and Proverbs.

My wife, Cindy has been spending a significant amount of time in Proverbs in her quiet time so every day she is telling me something about what she has seen there that she hadn’t seen before. It just reminds me of how rich it is. So let’s start with Psalm 100. This Psalm is so encouraging to me because when I sing it’s okay if what comes out of my mouth is a joyful noise for God delights with the joyful noise of His people.

Psalm 100:1-5 says *[1] Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth! [2] Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing! [3] 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. [4] Enter His gates with thanksgiving, and His courts with praise! Give thanks to Him; bless His name! [5] For the LORD is good; His steadfast love endures forever, and His faithfulness to all generations.*

Here we see how the very person of God becomes the foundation of the exhortations to the worship and praise of God. Note the way that the Psalmist moves from who God is to two things that God has done – Creator, He made you, and Redeemer, He took you into the flock of God, which He purchased with His own blood.

I love to hear and watch the fellowship before and after worship services for it’s a wonderful sign of those who love the Lord and love His people, but I think if there was anything that I would love to see happen is something that I experienced when I went to Uganda. I’ve been there nine times now and I’ll never forget at the All Saints Church, as I was standing there with the responsibility to preach that Lord’s Day afternoon, I start seeing the Ugandans streaming up the hill. As they are coming up the hill, they’re singing praise and thanksgiving to God. That was just extraordinary to see and hear that for what an enormous blessing! I couldn’t help but remember the collection in the Psalms, the Psalm of ascent, that as you ascend up into the hills of Zion and come to Mount Zion that they would sing those Psalms coming into His presence.

Notice in this Psalm that giving thanks to Him is an act of blessing His Name. Tuck that away in your mind just for a moment. Now let’s look at Psalm 107. This is a wonderfully rich Psalm that begins the fifth book of the Psalms. Notice how thanksgiving is a reflection of knowing who God is.

Psalm 107:1-3 says *[1] Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever! [2] Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom He has redeemed from trouble [3] and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the*

south. So here we're called as the redeemed of the Lord to mark out our thanksgiving to the Lord and mark out ourselves as the redeemed with our thanksgiving before the Lord.

It is remarkable to me is that because we're made in the image of God, there's this reflex to give thanks even among unbelievers, but there is not a reflex to give thanks to the Lord for who He is. Because of sin we remove the Lord as the object of receiving our thanks. I was amazed at what a man whom I respected as an athlete said around Thanksgiving. He said, 'Well, I just think we all ought to give thanks...' then I was thinking 'what is he about to say' because I've actually been praying for him to be converted for I knew his wife was converted and the next thing out of his mouth was, 'I tell you, every Thanksgiving, I just thank the 'blank' out of my lucky stars for all that I have.' This is a grown man. I mean, just how insane and absurd can you be? Notice, though, there is a desire to give thanks, but there is no desire to give thanks to the One who creates us, who redeems us and who sustains us, which becomes our opportunity for the redeemed to say so.

We praise Him because He is good and He is the Lord our God. Here I want to build on the rhythm of the Christian life. Now there can be much to be said about the culture of God's people in His church – how we're to live. The book of Corinthians gives a significant warning not to let the culture of the world penetrate, permeate and seep into the church. I'm going to get just a little bit controversial for a moment. The word 'culture' basically means values embraced by which you do business. It is the culture of an organization – the values that are embraced that become the guardrails and the guidelines of just how you do business in that institution.

The culture we see today is in a world that is in a death spiral, because Christ's church has actually redefined the mission and message of the church to get the applause of the culture. Therefore, it doesn't give its countercultural message and therefore it doesn't adopt a countercultural loving, but a countercultural lifestyle. Just how do we do business in relationships and responsibilities? That's culture.

Our new pastor of the Korean congregation here actually was a pastor of the Korean congregation that met in the church that I first pastored in Miami, Florida – Pinelands Presbyterian. When I went there, they were going to close it down and God very graciously intervened and allowed it to be there. So, out of Thanksgiving to the Lord, come up here and help us do a job and so he is now here serving the Lord. They were in our home the other night and what a wonderful what a wonderful family.

I'll never forget when I was just kind of working through this whole thing of Thanksgiving, of watching when God does something, how he turns people's lives around from being self-centered and critical, to being God centered and gracious. It's just the culture. At Pinelands, it was so pronounced. Pinelands was a church that for 15 years was the high watermark church in South Florida. There was a guy up in Fort Lauderdale. He would give anything for his church to be like Pinelands. His name was D. James Kennedy at Coral Ridge Presbyterian. Pinelands was going and blowing for it was over a thousand and it was unbelievable.

When I came to Pinelands, it was less than 50 and no children and the presbytery already had plans to close it down, but the Lord turned it around. Within a couple of years there were 400 to 500 new people coming to Christ. It was interesting to see the demographic of the church. There were Saint Lucians, Grenadians, people from Saint Vincent, Puerto Ricans, etc. The reason for this was because early on, the man who planted this church had a good Presbyterian church, and all these people were moving down from the north to retire to Florida. They invented

air conditioning and airplanes and this was very affordable land. So, they retired there in the 1950s and many of them were looking for Presbyterian Church. So that's how it grew.

When we lived there, I would walk out of my house and across the street were people from Grenada, next to them people from Texas, next door a Jewish couple from New York, a few doors down a couple from Haiti, another couple from the Dominican Republic and a couple from Saint Vincent. All these people with kids were my children's best friends. I thought "we're not living in America. We're living in the West Indies or the Caribbean." They didn't move to Miami looking for a Presbyterian church. So we're on the mission field and we have to realize that and reach out. God did this amazing thing.

People came to me and said, 'How do you have a multicultural church?' My answer was, "You can't for what you're looking at is multi-ethnic." But every church has a culture. It's a culture that reaches out and invites or one that closes down and accommodates and compromises. It's one of the two. You can't have multiple ways you do business as the church. It's a Great Commission, great commandment church, and you love everyone within earshot of the church, your parish, and you find a way to bring them in and watch them unite, not around ethnicity, but around Christ, because they're getting loved well. They're getting cared for well, and they know they're going to hear something.

That's why I think this matter of culture in the church is very important. We must always beware because for 2000 years, Satan has tried to insinuate the culture of unbelief and rebellion into the church – whether it's Corinth or Philippi or Ephesus, it doesn't matter. We need to be careful and understand that. One of the antidotes is to build into the culture of the church, thanksgiving.

I know I'm oversimplifying, but we are here because we love Jesus, Amen! Why do you love Jesus? Why did He save you? It is because He loved you and He first loved you. This is sovereign grace, before the foundation of the world. In love, He predestined us unto adoption (Ephesians 1:5). God has ordained His work of grace, and in order to accomplish it, it cost Him His Son, and in order to accomplish it in our life, His Son sent the Spirit. So we the company of the redeemed God's people, His Church. The redeemed are the recipients of the soul saving and life transforming grace of God for the glory of God.

Jesus did not send the Holy Spirit because He needed you. Jesus did not save you because you wanted to be saved. Jesus did not save you because without you He couldn't get done, what He wanted to do. Jesus did not need us, but He wanted us. Who are we? We are those who needed Him but didn't want Him, yet His irresistible grace saves us at the cross where Christ bought us and the Holy Spirit brings us to Christ.

Now, what is the response of the redeemed? The redeemed respond with thanksgiving. As it says in Psalm 100, let the redeemed of the Lord say so. Give thanks to the Lord. One of the things I love to do on Easter Sunday is when people say to me after the service, "Oh, this has been so wonderful celebrating the resurrection of Jesus this Sunday!" I will respond by saying "Praise the Lord and just so you know we're going to do the same thing next Sunday – celebrate the resurrection of Christ next Sunday because that's what we do every Lord's day."

I love the Thanksgiving holiday. I have so many memories from my family. I reject the notion that I'm privileged. I am not privileged, but I am blessed. God's providence has greatly blessed me. I had a mom and dad that loved me, loved each other and raised me. I have three sisters who love me and I could love. I have a wife that is incomparable and three children that I have to discipline myself away from pride and just give thanks. I have grandchildren that are going to go far beyond my children. I am very grateful. I've had the privilege to give my life for

the work of the Gospel and to His church. I am a blessed man. How in the world can I be silent? How in the world can I not every Lord's Day want to worship Him? How in the world can I possibly find something more important than that? I understand providential hindrance, but how can I not gather with His people and to give thanks? The redeemed respond to this sovereign grace initiative that redeems us.

Here's how the culture connects itself. God does His work to us. He initiates not because we ask Him, not because we wanted Him, and not because He needed us but out of pure grace, undeserved, unmerited, irresistible love. Now, what is our response back? Our response is thanksgiving and that thanksgiving comes from a heart of gratitude and the heart of gratitude is continually filled by the love of Christ.

Now, when the love of Christ takes hold of us, God's sovereign grace and our heart is filled with gratitude, and we begin to give thanks to the Lord, what does that thanksgiving look like? The answer to this could be extensive, but I don't have time for extensive because I want you to have time to give thanks. So, I want to just give you three things about the thanksgiving of God's people.

Number one, the thanksgiving of God's people is expressed in worship. That is really what we're doing every Sunday – out of thanks to the Lord, we're worshipping Him who is worthy of it and who has made us worthy in it through Christ. Thanksgiving is worship.

Hebrews 12:28-29 says [28] *Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe,* [29] *for our God is a consuming fire.* Psalm 35:27-28 says [27] *Let those who delight in my righteousness shout for joy and be glad and say evermore, "Great is the LORD, who delights in the welfare of his servant!"* [28] *Then my tongue shall tell of your righteousness and of your praise all the day long.*

These verses show the inseparable relationship between thanksgiving and gathered worship. These are but a few that show this relationship for there are many more. Gathered worship is not merely but profoundly an act of thanksgiving from a heart of gratitude, fed by the love of Christ. Many of us do not have that heart to worship in gathered worship because of poor preaching. Many of us think we got saved and really helped God out with this. It's not until you see yourself dead in your sins and under the judgment of God rightly, with no hope at all, that gratitude takes over.

If preachers would ever preach sovereign grace again and tell us who we are in our total depravity, then tell us what God did to save us, what the Spirit of God did to regenerate us, what Christ has done to justify us and what the Spirit of God is doing in transforming our lives for His glory, I believe we would once again count sacred rejoicing, reverent worship as glorious. Right now we judge worship not by what we're saying to God, but by what we got out of the service. We insist on making it about us instead of about Him. Let our hearts be filled with this Psalm;

Psalm 103:1-2 says [1] *Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name!* [2] *Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits.*

Secondly, thanksgiving is not only expressed in intentional worship, it is expressed in intentional obedience. It is out of thanksgiving that we obey the Lord that comes from a heart of gratitude that is motivated by the love of Christ which compels us (II Corinthians 5:14). Jesus said in John 14:15, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." If we love Him, we have gratitude. We have thanks and the result is obedience – imperfect, yes, but intentional. Our worship is imperfect, but intentional.

Finally, and thirdly, the thanksgiving of God's people is our intentional insistence to give thanks to the Lord, not only in our heart, but in the public square and in the assembling of God's people. Why? We want the world to know we're not what we were. What is the mark of unbelief? Romans 1:21-23 says [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.* They become fools and they do not give thanks.

According to Paul, if the mark of a culture and people in a death spiral is they don't give thanks, then if there's anything we want to do, it is to let the world know we give thanks in everything (I Thessalonians 5:18). Psalm 9:1-2 says [1] *I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart; I will recount all of your wonderful deeds. [2] I will be glad and exult in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.*

Give thanks with a grateful heart. Thank the Lord for who He is and what He's done, and thank the Lord for those whom He has used in your life for that was of Him – whether it's a father, a mother, a spouse, whoever it is, but give thanks to the Lord. May the world hear us, but most of all, may the Lord hear us, for He is worthy. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. God, encourage Your people as we encourage one another. Receive our thanks, O Lord. We are the redeemed. We are in the assembly of the redeemed and together we give thanks with a grateful heart because of the love of Christ, in Jesus' Name, Amen.