

Thanksgiving in Biblical Perspective  
“A History of Thanksgiving”  
Psalm 69:29–33  
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In this study I want to give you a couple of things about Thanksgiving historically and Biblically and our text will be in Psalm 69. This is a great and glorious passage of Scripture. There are many reasons why I so enjoy the Thanksgiving holiday. One is that it has always been very dear to my family when I was growing up. It was common for our family to be together during this time. We would move any obstacle possible for us to get together on Thanksgiving Day from my mother’s side and my father’s side of the family. After my parents went to be with the Lord my three sisters and I would do the same thing. We would do everything we could for our families to be together on this holiday as well. In this day and time I am not able to do that for I have one sister who is battling ovarian cancer and one who is already with the Lord. Now it’s mainly come down to my family, my kids and grandkids.

I’m not trying to tell you how to do your Thanksgiving for every family has their own traditions on this holiday. We always had a great meal and my sisters would make sure that there was no way all the food could be eaten in that one day, even though we might have 30 plus people sitting around that table. We would enjoy so many things about that day but one of the things we enjoyed took place after the meal where we would share stories with each other and then we would read the Scriptures of thanksgiving. Then what we did next would take a long time because we had a big family but everyone would get the opportunity no matter how long it took, to hear the things that we were all thankful for and that was so wonderful to hear. We gave thanksgiving to the Lord and then to each other as encouragement to one another.

I always noticed there were a number of things that were able to be done at that sharing time around the table. Thanksgiving Day had a number of objectives accomplished and those objectives are pretty much enumerated in this text from Psalm 69. After the text is given I will give a few remarks as to why I feel such a meal of thanksgiving and encouragement with such a profile; reading of Scripture, sharing the stories, personal contact and then a time to give thanks, is so valuable. So what does this accomplish? Let’s look at the text before I answer this question.

Psalm 69:29–33 says [29] *But I am afflicted and in pain; let your salvation, O God, set me on high!*

[30] *I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving.*  
[31] *This will please the LORD more than an ox or a bull with horns and hoofs. [32] When the humble see it they will be glad; you who seek God, let your hearts revive. [33] For the LORD hears the needy and does not despise his own people who are prisoners.*

So according to Psalm 69:29 I have been brought low by some kind of pain which could be physical, emotional, spiritual or a combination of them all. The Psalmist then asks for a salvation from the Lord that would deliver them and set them as victors. To set them high is the pedestal of victory but they know they can’t get there on their own and only the Lord can give them that victory. When the Lord gives that victory then by His hand of grace He sets us on high. So when that salvation comes what will you do?

When salvation arrives from the hand of the Lord the Psalmist sets about to do two things in response. Realize when salvation comes from the Lord we actually have multiple responses

so this by no means encompasses all the responses that God's people have when they are saved, but the Psalmist does enumerate two of those responses.

Number one is when people are saved by the grace of God they will worship. Secondly, they will bear witness to the Lord for He has saved them and they will bear witness to one another which include the needy and those who are seeking salvation for themselves. The Lord has already allowed us to illustrate this – through worship vertically and witness horizontally.

The Psalmist goes further by including how he will worship. He says two things about his worship but again this is not exhaustive of the worship of the redeemed. I used to hear this phrase from the Bible every Thanksgiving from my pastor at service close to the holiday. He would say 'Now is the time, let the redeemed of the Lord say so.' Do not be silent. Don't be embarrassed to be silent. Don't be silent in shame. Don't be silent because of self-congratulation but if you have been redeemed you have been redeemed by the Lord, now say so.

How do you say so? First of all you say so with worship that is done with praise songs – hymns, songs and psalms of praise. Psalm 69:30 says *[30] I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving.* Please notice the worship is not 'saved-centered' but it's the saved bringing worship to God. I will sing praise to His Name and I will say thanksgiving to give Him glory. We are not making Him something that He is not for to magnify something is to take who or what something is and extol it before others. Make sure that see that alone.

Perhaps you already sense this but I pray, lead and preach, first of all with humility on the Lord's Day and my part of the worship service morning and evening because I know I'm not capable of doing what God has called me to do, but I also do it with a certain amount of confidence because I know the Lord speaks to His people whenever His Word goes forth in worship, confession, reading, singing, hearing and preaching. So God takes over for this fool (me) for the through the foolishness of preaching God speaks and saves those who believe (I Corinthians 1:21).

Secondly, I pray that what you hear and experience in worship will drive so deeply into your heart that the world will not be able for the next six days to persuade you that life is about you. I pray that this worship service will be so God-centered, God magnifying, and God exalting that when you walk into the rest of your week it sets the thermostat for all you do to glorify God because I know as soon as possible Satan will come to you and tell you that it's all about you for a whole system in this world is designed to do that. You also have an old man within you that wants to believe that. I know that if you're battling for Jesus the rest of those six days that you can't wait to get back on the Lord's Day because you will need to praise Him and see His magnification again. This is what I pray worship will do for His glory in your life.

I do know two things are helpful beyond preaching. One is the singing of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs that are about the Lord. I know that musical instruments and notes are not evil for their amoral and I'm willing to try and use all of them to the glory of God but it's how you use them. I do know that content is either Biblical truth we're singing or it's adulterated. I love that which is new that lifts up praise to God as much as I love that which is old. The reason I want you to know the old stuff is because of its rich Biblical content.

My wife recently did a trio before we had Communion singing the hymn *Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross* which starts out;  
*Jesus, keep me near the cross,  
there a precious fountain,  
free to all, a healing stream,  
flows from Calvary's mountain.*

*Chorus:*

*In the cross, in the cross,  
be my glory ever;  
'til my raptured soul shall find,  
rest beyond the river.*

I asked her why she chose that hymn because I know of a number of hymns she could have sung before Communion. She told me that she had recently talked to so many people who had never heard this great hymn and she went on to say ‘Maybe today as they are concentrating on the Lord they hear what it is saying because of its depth, breadth, width and height of truth.’

The older hymns that are still around are around because they are about God and its done well. I’m not arguing for you to just learn the hymns but I will argue for that because I love that which is new about God as well. The point is that they are songs of praise to God. It’s God-centered – who God is, what God does as our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Joined to it are to be statements and declarations of thanksgiving. The Thanksgiving time is a dead give away for this.

I really think through all this and I believe that a service designed for thanksgiving should not be able to hold the people that would come. Thanksgiving is the evidence that you know you have been saved by grace and that you know you are what you are by the grace of God. Thanksgiving is the evidence to say ‘I can’t believe what God has done for me and has entrusted to me’ and ‘I can’t wait for others to hear it!’ I want to tell it to the hurting, to those who need to hear it, to my brothers and sisters and to the Lord. People need to hear thanksgiving in light of what they are facing.

What is the result of thanksgiving from this Psalm 69 passage? He gives three results. Result number one is when you sing praise and give thanks you magnify the Lord. Now if you’re giving thanks to thanks that doesn’t work. Thanksgiving is not turkey day or football day. Thanksgiving is give thanks to the Lord. Psalm 92:1 says *[1] It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praises to your name, O Most High.*

I heard one man on television, who was an athlete, start off a thanksgiving message when he was asked ‘What do you want to do about Thanksgiving?’ He answered ‘I just want to thank my lucky stars.’ What in the world are lucky stars, besides a cereal?! We give thanks to the Lord, person to Person. God thank You for making me, sustaining me and that You have never forsaken me. Your Son has saved me. Your Spirit indwells me. You have made me a holy of holies for I’m a temple of the Holy Spirit. You have granted me the privilege to be an ambassador of and for Christ. You magnify the name of the Lord.

The second result when you sing praise and give thanks to the Lord is that you encourage your brothers and sisters. Psalm 69:30–33 says *[30] I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving. [31] This will please the LORD more than an ox or a bull with horns and hoofs. [32] When the humble see it they will be glad; you who seek God, let your hearts revive. [33] For the LORD hears the needy and does not despise his own people who are prisoners.*

When this was recent sacrifices were still appropriate because Christ had not yet come but the Psalmist is saying as much as you bring the sacrificial offerings to worship in the Old Covenant, it doesn’t compare when God’s people raise their voice in praise and give thanks to Him. It magnifies and pleases Him. According to Psalm 69:32 when God’s people hear and see your thanksgiving it emboldens, encourages and gladdens them. It brings joy to them to hear your thanksgiving to the Lord. It is true in your family and in the family of God.

The third result when you sing praise and give thanks to the Lord is you're bearing saving witness to the lost. What about those God is moving to bring to Himself? Psalm 69:32b and 33 says that those who seek God let their hearts revive, for the Lord hears the needy and does not despise his own people who are prisoners. When those who are seeking hear God's people worship, in thanksgiving and magnifying the Lord then they are drawn to the Lord.

We live in a country that has valued Thanksgiving and I love that because this is a distinctly Christian holiday. It also formerly originated in America but it didn't start in America. Calvin used to call for days of thanksgiving in Geneva. Bootzer used to call for thanksgiving in Strasburg. Zwingli used to call for days of thanksgiving in Zurich. Knox would call for days of thanksgiving throughout Scotland. Even kings would call for days of thanksgiving, such as Edward the VI so it's not new. But here it hasn't only been done but it's been enshrined.

Not every president of the US affirmed it for Thomas Jefferson vigorously opposed a Thanksgiving holiday. He opposed it with Washington did it, when John Adams did it and when James Madison did it. There are other presidents that have opposed it but our founding father and president did not oppose it. Here is how George Washington initiated Thanksgiving. On October 3<sup>rd</sup>, writing from Mount Vernon, having been sought out by the elected officials of the Senate and the Congress, not long after we had left the inadequate Articles of Confederation as we now embrace the blessings of a Constitution and not long after a tax rebellion had been squashed, here is what he says;

*Whereas it is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly to implore his protection and favor – and whereas both Houses of Congress have by their joint Committee requested me to recommend to the People of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many signal favors of Almighty God especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness.*

*Now therefore I do recommend and assign Thursday the 26th day of November next to be devoted by the People of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being, who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be – That we may then all unite in rendering unto him our sincere and humble thanks – for his kind care and protection of the People of this Country previous to their becoming a Nation – for the signal and manifold mercies, and the favorable interpositions of his Providence which we experienced in the course and conclusion of the late war – for the great degree of tranquility, union, and plenty, which we have since enjoyed – for the peaceable and rational manner, in which we have been enabled to establish constitutions of government for our safety and happiness, and particularly the national One now lately instituted – for the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed; and the means we have of acquiring and diffusing useful knowledge; and in general for all the great and various favors which he hath been pleased to confer upon us.*

*And also that we may then unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations and beseech him to pardon our national and other transgressions – to enable us all, whether in public or private stations, to perform our several and relative duties properly and punctually – to render our national government a blessing to all the people, by constantly being a Government of wise, just, and constitutional laws, discreetly and faithfully executed and obeyed – to protect and guide all Sovereigns and Nations (especially such as have shown kindness unto us) and to bless them with good government, peace, and concord – To promote the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue, and the increase of*

*knowledge (science) among them and us – and generally to grant unto all Mankind such a degree of temporal prosperity as he alone knows to be best.*

*Given under my hand at the City of New York the third day of October in the year of our Lord 1789.*

That set in motion what we will all enjoy this coming week. It was initiated by the practice of God's people and it was furthered into the fabric of our nation by the diligence of God's people and may it be so. May we His people give thanks and magnify His name forever.

Before my sister went home to be with the Lord, there was one that sat at our table and that was my mother's sister, at Thanksgiving. That was the only time that we knew of that she would hear about Jesus so I have to confess I would load my thanksgiving up with the Gospel every time and so would my sisters. Not many months after that Thanksgiving my sister followed up with my mother's sister and she prayed to receive Christ just three days before she ceased to live here on this earth. Then my sister in less than three weeks after that would be with the Lord, but it was at a Thanksgiving table giving thanks that the Gospel was planted and another one was brought to magnify the Lord.

Give thanks. Magnify the Lord. Encourage His people and bear witness to the lost. Jesus saves by grace. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Would You bless us as we now bless Your holy name? We give thanks to the Lord, in Jesus' Name, Amen.