

BEING THANKFUL¹

Psalm 136.1-3, 26

“Give thanks to the Lord, for his is good;
For his lovingkindness is everlasting.
Give thanks to the God of gods,
For his lovingkindness is everlasting.
Give thanks to the Lord of lords,
For his lovingkindness is everlasting.
Give thanks to the God of heaven,
For his lovingkindness is everlasting.”

Introduction

1. Our national holiday of thanksgiving is a good practice, but we should not restrict our giving of thanks to God to one day of the year.
2. Ephesians 5.20 teaches us to “always give thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God.”
3. Hebrews 13.15 says, “Let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to his name.”
4. Instead of grumbling and complaining, God’s people are to have an attitude of continual gratitude.

Discussion

- I. God’s faithful servants always have been thankful.
 - A. One writer in the Hebrew Bible expressed this attitude of gratitude and said,
“So we thy people and the sheep of thy pasture
Will give thanks to thee forever;
To all generations we will tell of thy praise” (Psalm 79.13).
 - B. Thanksgiving was an important part of the praise of God under the Mosaic covenant.
 1. Leviticus 7 includes instructions for the sacrifice of thanksgiving. Here three different occasions for the peace offering are implied: in gratitude for deliverance from illness or death (Psalm 107), in fulfillment of a vow (Psalm 116.12-19), and in heartfelt realization of the Lord’s kindness (Psalm 54.6).

¹Scripture quotations are adapted from the New American Standard Bible (1971).

2. When Hezekiah (ca. 715 BC) reestablished the true religion of the Hebrew people in Judea, he said to the people, “Now that you have consecrated yourselves to the Lord, come near the bring sacrifices and thank offerings to the house of the Lord” (2 Chronicles 29.31). And the assembly brought sacrifices and thank offerings, and all those who were willing brought burnt offerings.
3. When God’s people returned from exile in Babylon and rebuilt the dedicated the walls of Jerusalem, they gave “songs of praise and hymns of thanksgiving to God” (Nehemiah 12.46).
4. Thanksgiving was part of Israel’s life as the people of God, and it is a part of ours. Philippians 4.6 instructs us, “In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

II. We can be thankful to our God for so many things.

A. We have an abundance of material blessings.

1. We can be thankful for our daily meals. When Jesus performed a marvelous deed to feed a large gathering of people, Mark 8.6 tells us, “He directed the multitude to sit down on the ground; and taking the seven loaves, he gave thanks and broke them, and began giving them to his disciples, and they served them to the multitude.”
2. We have clothes to wear and homes for shelter. For this, we can be thankful.
3. Even at a time of loss, we can be thankful. After he was robbed, Matthew Henry wrote in his diary: “I have not been robbed before; the thief did not take my life; not much was taken, only money; it was I who was robbed, and I was not the one who did the robbing.”
4. We can be thankful for our health. In Luke 17, there is the story of ten men with leprosy. These societal outcasts cried out to the Lord from a distance, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” Jesus told them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” As they were going, they were cleansed. One, when he saw he had been healed, turned back, glorified God with a loud voice, and he fell on his face at the feet of Jesus and gave thanks to him. And this thankful one was a Samaritan.
 - a. Nine of the ten were not explicitly thankful. We take too much for granted. We fail to be thankful until we are deprived of what we have (e.g., our sight, our arms and legs, our memory, etc.).
 - b. Do not grumble. See 1 Corinthians 10.6-10.

B. We can be thankful to God for our families.

1. Young people, be thankful for your parents. They have raised you. They have worked hard to give you what you need. Respect them. Honor them.
2. In the words of the apostle Paul, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right” (Ephesians 6.1).
3. Parents, be thankful for your children. God has not blessed everyone with children. Spend time with them. Love them dearly while they still live at home with you.

4. In the words of the apostle Paul, “Do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6.4).
- C. Because many who are in the world do terrible things (i.e., the mischievous, the rioters, the adulterers, the thieves and robbers, the murderers), we should be thankful for people with good values, especially our Christian brothers and sisters, and express our gratitude to them.
1. After Paul arrived at the Market of Appius on his journey to Rome, other believers in Jesus came forty miles from the Imperial City to greet him. “When Paul saw them, he thanked God, and took courage” (Acts 29.15).
 2. Paul always gave thanks for fellow Christians. “I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all” (Romans 1.8). “I thank my God always concerning you” (1 Corinthians 1.4). “I do not cease giving thanks for you” (Ephesians 1.16). “I thank my God in all my remembrance of you” (Philippians 1.3). “We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you” (Colossians 1.3). “We give thank to God always for all of you” (1 Thessalonians 1.2; cf. 2 Thessalonians 1.3).
- D. Because we enjoy many personal rights and liberties in our country, especially to serve our God, we should give thanks for our government (in spite of all the problems).
1. Paul instructed, “I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2.1-4).
 2. We live in a democracy. Our country is not ransacked nor ravaged by external invaders. We have laws to protect our rights. We enjoy the blessings of education, health care, and free enterprise.
- III. The greatest gifts for which we can be thankful are those blessings we have in Jesus Christ our Lord.
- A. God’s gift to us of Jesus the Messiah is beyond words. And for those of us who have put our trust in Jesus, we have the assurance of deliverance from sin and victory over Satan. “Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15.57). Christ paid our debt. When a financial debt is paid by someone else, we are very grateful.
- B. With this deliverance is the peace of God that surpasses all human understanding. “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful” (Colossians 3.15).
- C. Every Lord’s day we are thankful for the supper of our Lord, this time of communion in the sacrifice of Christ. As Jesus took the bread and gave thanks, so do we. As Jesus took the cup and gave thanks, so do we.
- D. We are thankful for the written Word of God, directed by the Holy Spirit through God’s apostles and preserved by the early believers.

1. Many documents of antiquity have not survived, and other documents that have survived are scarce.
 2. There are thousands of manuscripts (i.e., both fragments and complete) for the New Testament. The only comparable ancient work is Homer's *Iliad* with less than one thousand manuscripts preserved.
- E. And we are thankful for the gathering together of God's people by the power of God's Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

1. We can be thankful for the power of God to bring all his plans to their accomplishment (see Revelation 11.16f.).
2. Are you thankful?
3. A Christian farmer, not very active in his religious life, heard a sermon on Isaiah 1.3, "An ox knows its owner, and a donkey its master's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand." The message made an impression on the farmer, but it was not enough to motivate him to serve God better. But later, when he was feeding his livestock, one of his cattle began to lick his arm. He thought, "This brute of a beast is more grateful to me than I am to God, and I am in debt to God for everything."