

Thanksgiving

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[0:00] I wonder if you think about giving thanks a little bit like this. My hard-earned work has put food on our table.

So thanks surely goes to me. Or I have loved my mum and dad so much. All through the year, surely they are going to get presents because they want to give thanks to me.

Or I have bought food for the food bank today. Thanks must go to me, not to God.

Or you may even be thinking, why on earth are we giving thanks to God for Micah coming into the world when surely Becky has done all the work for like nine long months.

Surely the thanks goes all to her. Why would we give thanks to God? Well this psalm helps us to see why should we give thanks to God?

[1:02] Why do we give thanks? Well we give thanks to people because of good things that they give to us, don't we?

When we were growing up in our household, after every birthday and Christmas, and if we ever got gifts any other time of the year, we would often be made to sit down and write a thank you card or a thank you letter.

I'm sure many of you do that. But if I'm honest, I didn't always enjoy that. There were even some Christmas and birthdays where I thought, I hope I don't get much at all because I don't want to sit down and write all those thank yous.

I've grown up a bit. I've learned some things about thankfulness. I've got more to learn, but I've learned that actually gifts are things we should give thanks for.

They cost money. They cost people's time. And they're given because people want to give to us.

[2:14] They've thought of us. And so we think, thank you so much for thinking of me. They don't have to. They don't have to give me anything. But they choose to.

And so we should give thanks. And this psalm helps us to see who we should give thanks for, for everything that we have.

The thanks in this particular psalm, it doesn't go to ourselves. It doesn't go to each other, human beings. Notice who it's for.

Verse 1, give thanks to the Lord. Verse 2, give thanks to the God of gods. Give thanks to the Lord of lords. Give thanks to someone who was the greatest.

And the psalm ends with, give thanks to the God of heaven. Someone who's higher than us.

Someone who's greater and someone who's higher than any of us.

[3:22] Wonder how we feel about that this morning. And there's something very specific in this psalm that we should give thanks for to God.

There's lots of things, but there's something particular. We said it 26 times. It took 130 words of this psalm. Over and over again.

Maybe just for 30 seconds to make sure we're awake. Turn to the people around you. What was that thing that we're told to give thanks for? It's gone silent.

Perhaps that was too easy. What was it anyone want to tell us? His love endures forever. People shouted out. Gracie, I'll check with you. His love endures forever.

We've been listening. That's good. His love endures forever. How did you make that feel? How did that make you feel to say that over and over and over again?

[4:26] At what point did you zone out? Or think, I've got this now. Can we just skip those bits? It's important.

This psalm is telling us that all the good things that we enjoy, all the good gifts around us were because of his love. And his love, I want to suggest to us, it is greater than any other love we will

find in this world.

Perhaps we love someone for something they have done for us. Perhaps they bought us a cup of coffee this week, so we love them. They're our favorite person at the moment.

Or we love because they show us love. If any of you have had a pet before, particularly a dog. I remember our dog as we were growing up. We would walk into the house, and he would be so excited to see us. He loved us. He loved seeing us. So we couldn't help but love him back.

[5:36] But God's love is an incredible kind of love. Because we see here in this psalm and all through the Bible that his love even extends to people that don't actually love him back.

That he shows incredible loving kindness even when people think they don't need him. And his love is shown to us, shown to the world in all sorts of ways.

But this morning we're just going to see three, three gifts of God's love for us to see from the reading we had. And I need your help to find out what these gifts are.

So, particularly if you're younger, would anybody like to help me open the first gift? We've got three down here, so there will be other opportunities. Can we go Isaac and Gracie?

Because it's quite big. We might need two of you. Unwrap this gift, and then we'll see what it is. You can just go wild.

[6:41] Whoa. Can you hold it up for a moment? Wow. I'll take that. The world. Give thanks for the world.

If you don't know, that's the biggest world I could find on Amazon. Blow up world, anyway. Give thanks for the world, for creation.

Give thanks for creation. We read this in verse 4. It's a hymn alone who does great wonders. And that word wonders is an amazing word.

It means, like, immeasurably wonderful. Too wonderful that our words can't describe it. That's what that word wonderful means.

And I think he's shown so many wonders in creation. And so does this psalm. Look at verse 5 and 6. This world, this creation is here because by his understanding, he made the heavens.

[7:47] He spread out the earth upon the waters. So that's telling us that by his understanding, Mount Everest, the tallest of the mountains, stands strong and tall.

By his understanding, we look at the grandeur of the Grand Canyon. By his understanding, we see the might of the Niagara Falls.

And these are just three things that show us his wonderful work in the world. It's a bit like God has, is like the ultimate artist.

And so to help us to see that, I've done some artwork for us this morning. So you can work out how wonderful that might be yourselves and how much time I spent doing that.

But this world, I want to say, is like a wonderful piece of art that God has made for us.

[8:55] I'm aware that as we're hearing this, some of us might think, hang on a minute. Oh, very nice, Daniel, that you say God made the world. But I didn't believe that.

Actually, science shows us how the world was made and it doesn't involve God. Or perhaps you're thinking about something your friend might tell you about this. By he.

Let me just say one thing about that. I think science helps us to see how things happen. And I think that the Bible helps us to understand who has brought these things about.

Science legend Stephen Hawking, not here anymore, sadly. And one said this, If one considers the possible constants and laws that could have emerged, the odds against a universe coming into being that's produced life like ours are immense.

According to my limited scientific knowledge, it's absolutely amazing that this world, this universe is here. Apparently, if the Big Bang happened at a very slightly lower or faster speed, then there wouldn't be life as we know it.

[10:17] Surely these incredibly precise details point to someone, something being behind that, rather than just like random charts. Food for thought.

Well, since living in Brighton, I have seen some wonderful sunsets. Particularly when you're by Brighton Beach, when it's sunset time, you see some wonderful, wonderful scenes and the photos

don't do it justice.

And when I have stood there and seen those wonderful sunsets, others have been standing there as well in awe at the beauty of them.

Our psalm tells us that it's by God's understanding that the sun is here. Verse 8, The sun, he made the sun to govern the day.

I'm not surprised that some people will stop and they'll worship the sun. But this psalm helps us to see someone even bigger behind the beauty of the sun.

[11:25] The creator God who has made the great lights. Isn't that amazing? And it's a sign of his love. His love endures forever.

It's seen in the world around us. Because none of us really have done anything to deserve living on this planet. And we've given thanks to God for Micah today because, you know what, it wasn't his choice to be here.

He hasn't done anything to be here. And so we thank God for making him, for bringing him safely into the world. None of us deserve the gift of life.

Surely it's a gift given in love by God, the creator. And so we give thanks to him because his love endures forever.

We're going to pause there and we're going to sing a hymn which helps us to thank God for all the good gifts around us.

[12:37] All good gifts around us are sent from heaven above. Then thank the Lord. I thank the Lord for all his love. You'll notice the first line. We plow the fields and scatter.

This is an old harvest hymn. This is the harvest season at the moment. Many churches will have big harvest festivals. We might not directly be plowing the seeds and scattering them, but people do on our behalf and we can be thankful for them.

So when our musicians are ready, we'll stand and we'll sing together. So gift number one, God's creation.

It's amazing. But how would you feel if someone took a gift that you had sort of lovingly given them? A bit like this. You'd lovingly given them a gift. You'd lovingly spent hours and hours, days and days drawing a masterpiece.

[13:56] And then the person you gave the gift to did this. How would you feel?

That's sort of what's happened in our world. God's made a good world for humans to live in. But the Bible shows us that those first two human beings have got to enjoy the gift of this world before any of us.

They basically did that. By their actions, they said, no, this good world that you've made for us isn't enough.

We want more. We're going to disobey you and we're going to go our way. And so we find the effects are all around us, don't we?

We find that this world is broken. This week was struck by these pitches in Gaza.

[15:20] This world is broken. It's horrible. We're collecting for a food bank today because this world is broken. Things don't work properly.

Things are unfair. People are going hungry. They're going without food. And even our families are broken. Marriages are broken.

Relationships are broken. People hurt one another. And if we look within ourselves carefully, we'll find that actually we are broken.

We are selfish. In our anger, we might hurt others by our words or something we do to them. We lie to try and make others think we're good or great.

We don't always want to thank others for their kindness to us. We think, no, we deserve that. Of course you'd give that to me. We don't always stop and thank God for all the gifts around us.

[16:36] And the Bible calls this brokenness in a sin. In our church, we say that sin is saying, shove off God.

I'm in charge. Not you. Saying that to the one who has made this world and given us the good gift of life. That's hard to hear.

But don't worry. There's two more gifts in this psalm that we can thank God for. So, we need some help from someone. Help us open the next gift.

Can we have a volunteer? Shall we put it down the Rayfields row? And then we'll come to Arabella for the third one. There we go. Can you open that and show us what's inside?

Do you want to hold that up? Turn it around.

[17:41] What might that be? Thank you, Isa. What might this be? You can keep the box if you want to. I wonder what that reminds you of.

I think that can help to remind us of rescue. Someone stuck it to you. Throw it to them and they can be rescued. And that's what we see next in our psalm.

Rescue. Just a bit of background. In the Old Testament, God chose a nation to be his.

To make known his ways to them and through them to the whole world. And that nation is the nation of Israel. And in the Bible story, at one point, we find that they are living in Egypt.

But life in Egypt is pretty hard. They're in slavery. They're slaves in Egypt. And so they cry out to God, please rescue us.

[18:50] And so we see this amazing rescue going on. It's in the book of Exodus. But we also find in Egypt that Egypt is ruled by pharaohs.

And they didn't want to let Israel go. They're amazingly useful to us. They do everything that we want them to do. But verse 11 helps us to see what happened to Israel whilst they were in Egypt. Verse 11. Then God brought Israel out from among them, from among the people in Egypt. And verse 12. With a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.

Finally, God had made a way for them to escape pharaoh and his rule. But there came a problem.

You see, pharaoh and his army, they'd let them go. But they suddenly thought, what have we done? Why have we done this? So they start chasing after the Israelites as they make their way out.

[19:58] But there's a problem. There's sea in the way. What are the people going to do with this sea? How are they going to get through it?

They can't. They drown. So, verse 13. God, in his love for his people, we're told, to him who divided the Red Sea asunder and brought Israel through the midst of it.

God made a way. God, the great creator God, made a way through the sea. Amazing. And so, they could get safely to the other side.

But what about pharaoh and his army? Chasing them down, closing in on them? Will they also go through the Red Sea? Well, verse 15 tells us this.

God swept pharaoh and his army into the Red Sea. How did you feel when we read that line and then said, His love endures forever?

[21:07] That doesn't sound right, does it? How could we say that God loves and yet he drowns people? How can God be good and loving but also be so harsh?

It's a question that comes as we read this up. Well, we see that he does because he is a God who loves.

And when he loves, he acts justly. See, when people do wrong things to us, or when people do wrong things to those that we love, we want those wrong things to be made right.

If someone took our mum or dad away unfairly and put them in prison, they'd done nothing wrong, we would want justice.

We would want that to be made right, wouldn't we? And that's the same for God with his people here. His people were treated unfairly, harshly, by the Egyptians.

[22:24] And so, in love, he wants justice to be shown. But, we also see in the story in Exodus, that God is also very fair and patient with the Egyptians.

Pharaoh is asked to let God's people go, and he doesn't. And so, God says, you know what, you can't mess with the God who's made the world, Pharaoh.

And so, he sends these plagues on them. Sends a plague to wake Pharaoh up and say, okay, God, I'm going to listen to you, and I'm going to follow your ways.

But, after each one, he doesn't. He doesn't change. And so, another plague comes. There's plagues of frogs, and plagues of gnats, and plagues of darkness, and other things.

And each one was that warning to Pharaoh. See who you're messing with here. Stop messing with him. Follow him. Listen to him and his ways.

[23:34] But, in the end, those warnings stopped. He had lots of chances, but those warnings stopped, and he wouldn't turn to God. And it's a

warning to us, actually.

If we do not listen to God and follow him, then, actually, the Bible speaks of a judgment to come. It's loving of God to give the good gift of life to this world.

And it's loving of God that he shows in the Bible that he's a God of justice, a God who judges wrongdoing. And his love is so kind to us.

None of us deserve it. All of us have said, shove off God, I'm in charge, not you. And yet, he still shows amazing love.

And the story of his people in the Exodus points to that. Verse 10 is a reference to the final plague in Egypt.

[24:40] Verse 10, To him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt. All the firstborn sons would die unless these instructions are followed.

This includes his own people, Israel. They didn't follow these instructions. God said that this would happen. And what they had to do was get a lamb and get the lamb killed and then paint red blood on the doors of their homes.

And if they did that, then their families, their firstborns, they would be safe. See, to kill a lamb in that way means a life has already died in the place of someone else's life.

And this event here points us to another rescue that happens later in the Bible. It's the rescue where God's son, God's firstborn son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who himself is God, comes and he's born into this world.

And he comes on a mission. He comes on a rescue mission to save people from their sins. And that rescue takes place for us at the cross.

[26:05] At the cross, we see that God is so loving that instead of the judgment for our sin going to us, it goes on himself instead.

Jesus takes it for us so we can be free. And like many good gifts, it costs, and it costs Jesus his life. And this is where we see the greatest love, God's love. This is love. Not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Love is shown at the cross. And so it is right that we give thanks to God for many good things, but most importantly, right, that we give thanks to him for this, for the gift of his son, Jesus.

And if we know his love, then what Jesus has done for us on the cross makes such a difference to our lives. So perhaps there's a boy in our class who keeps being mean to us.

[27:26] And yet if we know Jesus, however that makes us feel, if we know Jesus, we can look to the cross and know that we are so loved by God. We might not feel loved in that class, but we know we feel loved by God.

And that is amazing. Or when it's one of those days and nothing seems to be going right for us, everything's going wrong, and we just feel like life's a mess, we can look to the cross and know that everything important was really made right for us there at the cross as we see God's love for us in Jesus.

Or if it's a day when it feels like nobody cares for us, nobody loves us. Do you ever get those sign of days? Remember what God has done for us at the cross.

And His love doesn't change. And so we give thanks to God for this, for His loving rescue. But we've got one more thing, one more gift to see.

And I think we're taking this one to Arabella. Is that right? Do you still want tea? Go on. See if you can come and open it. There we go. I'd go for the top.

[28:55] Amazing. Do you want to hold that up for people to see? There we go. Nice and high. Wow. Amazing. Thank you. I'll take that to the front so we can all see it.

Thank you so much, Arabella. There it is on the screen if you can't see it.

God's forever love. As we read those verses, His love endures forever. On and on and on it went, didn't it?

And perhaps it feels like I've been talking forever as well. And you can't wait for this sermon to end. Bear with us just for a few moments more. Because I think this is the best bit.

God's forever love. Here's a couple. They're called Herbert and Zelmer Fisher. And they are currently in the history books for having the longest marriage.

[29:59] 86 years and I think 290 days. Isn't that impressive? I don't know when they got married. Wonderful.

Long, long love. And perhaps, perhaps some of us enjoy, have enjoyed falling in love and we're in love and we think this love is going to last and last and last.

Perhaps some of us assume one day we'll grow up and we'll fall in love and it will last and last and last. Perhaps some of us wonder if we ever will. And that's hard.

But even the best of human loves comes to an end. As this couple are no longer married.

Herbert in 2011 dies. Even the best of human loves comes to an end. But this psalm speaks of a forever love.

[31:06] His love. God's love endures forever. And this love is found.

In the gift of his son. Who offers that rescue for us. From our sin and death and judgment. And we can be sure that his love lasts forever.

Because though we've said Jesus died. Jesus died at the cross. For him death wasn't the end. He rose again triumphant over death.

And the Bible describes him now as the firstborn from among the dead. Which means all those who trust in his work to save. To rescue them.

Will live forever. But it won't be forever in this world that's broken. It will be one day sharing life.

[32:14] With God and with his people. In a world that will be made new. Where there will be an end to all suffering. All those scenes of war and devastation.

At an end. No more tears. No more sin. No more death. No more parting. No more endings. No more feelings.

But we don't need to sit and wait for this forever love. God offers this forever love to us today.

If we trust in the work of his son, the Lord Jesus. And if we know his forever love. His forever and unchanging love.

Then what a security it is. Not just in the future. Not just when death comes. But all through our lives.

[33:19] Our lives are full of all sorts of changing things, aren't they? We change schools. We change jobs. One day some of us will leave Brighton.

And that will change things. I know that I change from moment to moment. My emotions change.

One moment I'm sad. The next moment I'm happy. And all sorts of other things.

But this is a forever love. Which we're told endures. It's unchanging. God's love doesn't change. It's something we can rest secure in.

Even when everything else is changing around us. I'll finish with this. Micah being here this morning at the front.

And giving thanks to him. You'll know Becky and I have been through a big change over the last few months. Having a baby. And it's been wonderful. He is a joy and delight.

[34:26] But everything feels quite overwhelming. And on Tuesday I was telling Becky in the evening just how overwhelmed I was with just everything.

Not doing anything well. Letting everyone down. But I was reminded by her. I was reminded by some songs I was listening to as I went to bed.

And then this week looking at this passage. Reminded that God's forever love is still true for me.

Even when I'm feeling overwhelmed.

Even when I'm feeling anxious. And so we can. For God's people we can enjoy and rest in the security of God's forever love for us.

Whatever's going on. And for that we want to give thanks to the Lord. For his love endures forever. Amen.