

To the LORD Give Thanks

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[0 : 00] Okay, there we go. Perfect. Alright, well it's Thanksgiving weekend as we've said numerous times already today.! Many will be gathering with family and friends for special meals today and tomorrow.

! And a lot of what we do around this time of year is owing to tradition, to what we see in our culture or maybe to what we grew up with. And of course, for most, turkey, pumpkin pie, a celebratory gathering, maybe even going around the table and saying something that you are thankful for. Interestingly though, as we look around in our culture today, we notice that Thanksgiving is marked similarly by both Christians and non-Christians. It's a public, national holiday in a now very secular culture.

And because of that, it can be difficult to know, maybe, a little bit of what to do with Thanksgiving. Must we keep all the traditions going? What if our loved ones are far away? What if our family is fractured? Is there a true meaning to Thanksgiving? Is it even a Christian holiday? Some ask.

[1 : 23] Or does it have its roots in pagan harvest festivals? And then as we think about the gathering that we have, year after year, does our family gathering at this time honor Christ?

Does our celebration acknowledge God as the giver of all the good things that we have? Or could it be that we've settled into just going through the motions, enjoying some good food with family or friends, and reflecting to ourselves about how the glass is half full rather than half empty?

As Christians, we like to trace out the origins of holidays. And for some, if its origin is pagan, they may choose to shun the holiday.

But if its origins are in the Bible or from God, from Jesus, then we may try and get back to that meaning. But tracing out the origin of Thanksgiving is no easy task.

As we look back into history, since the fall of man in the garden, there has been the problem of idolatry and false religion. There's been the mistake of giving credit for the good things that we have to false gods and idols.

[2 : 45] There are cuneiform tablets dating back to the time of Abraham, which contain hymns and prayers and temple rituals related to harvest. But these are not hymns and prayers and rituals to the Lord.

The God of Abraham. But to fertility and grain gods like Tammuz and Ishtar. Similarly, in ancient Egypt, people worshipped the Nile River.

They saw it as the divine gift of the gods. We still have floating around somewheres out there the text today of the ancient hymn to the Nile, which says, Those are the words they used to sing to the Nile long ago.

As we look back into history, since the fall of man in the garden, there has been the problem of idolatry and false religion. There's been the mistake of giving credit for the good things that we have to false gods.

Paul said it this way in his letter to the church at Rome. I'm reading from Romans 1, verse 21.

[4 : 20] For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God, nor gave thanks to him. But their thinking became futile, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being, and birds, and animals, and reptiles.

Those words really stood out to me. They neither glorified him as God, nor gave thanks to him. Just a little bit down the page, in verse 25.

They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things, rather than the creator. What these verses reveal to us is that we were meant to give thanks to God.

The one true God, to Yahweh, our creator. We were meant to give thanks to him for everything that we have. All the good things in life, and even life itself.

[5 : 38] But, when man rebelled against God, and was corrupted by sin, our hearts were darkened. As Paul said, we became fools, giving credit, and thanks, that God deserves, to anything and anyone but him.

worshipping the river, worshipping the river, because it gives us the water for our crops, which sustain us. Worshipping Tammuz, and Ishtar.

Now who are they anyway? Probably fallen angels, posing as deities, attempting to steal worship away from, the one true God, whom they have rebelled against as well.

It was in the midst of all this, that God chose one man, a man to bless, a man to reveal himself to, a man to make a special covenant with.

God chose Abraham. He made promises, to Abraham, that his descendants, would become a great nation, and that he would be the God, of this people.

[6 : 51] That they would belong to him. We can read all about this in the Bible, in the book of Genesis. God did indeed, bless Abraham, in all kinds of ways, giving all kinds of good things, to him as gifts of his grace.

And not because Abraham was deserving, or worthy. Abraham came from Ur. Abraham's dad, worshipped the false gods, of the Chaldeans.

But because God is merciful, and kind, and gracious, he chose Abraham, and he began to bless him, in all kinds of ways. Abraham became a worshiper, of the Lord.

He became one of the very few, in his day, to acknowledge God, the true God, as the giver, of everything good. We might even say, that giving thanks to God, the God who deserves it, was reestablished, on the earth, in Abraham's day.

Well as the story goes, Abraham's descendants, went down to Egypt, and, became very numerous. If you know the story, they went to Egypt, to avoid, to survive, the famine.

[8 : 04] There were 70 of them, in all. And of course, they survived the famine, because of that dream, that Yahweh gave to Pharaoh, which Joseph, the great grandson, of Abraham, interpreted.

Even just pausing, to think about that, for a second. God proved, that he is Lord, of the harvest. Seven years, of plentiful harvests, God decreed.

And that's what happened. Seven years of famine, God decreed. And that's what happened.

Yahweh, is Lord of the harvest. Not the Nile, not the Egyptian, fertility gods.

Well there in Egypt, the Israelites, grew in number, from 70, to about 2 million, over a period, of 430 years. And they were, immersed, in Egyptian culture. They were surrounded, by Egyptian religion, and the worship, of false gods.

And then in a stunning, display of power, Yahweh, brought them all, out of Egypt. Which, at that time, was one of the most, powerful nations, on earth.

[9 : 12] The Lord, delivered them, from Egypt. He led them out, into the desert, where he formalized, a covenant, with them at Mount Sinai. And there at Sinai, God revealed himself, to the whole nation.

He gave them, a glimpse of his glory, and his power. And you can read, all this in the Bible, in the book of Exodus. And God, as the one who, rescued them, from captivity, and slavery, said, you are now free.

And you shall belong, to me. You shall be, my people. I will bless you. I will keep, all the promises, that I made to Abraham, and to Isaac, and to Jacob.

I will keep them, to you. He entered, into a covenant, with them, there at Sinai. And he gave them, a law to live by, as a nation. And instructions, about how they were, to serve him, and worship him.

And one of the things, God instituted, for the people of Israel, was a thanksgiving, like festival. We read about this, in Exodus, chapter 23. in verse 14, God is, speaking there, and he says, three times a year, you are to celebrate, a festival to me.

[10 : 28] Celebrate the festival, of unleavened bread. Celebrate the festival, of harvest, with the first fruits, of the crops, you sow, in your field.

Celebrate the festival, of ingathering, at the end of the year, when you gather, in your crops, from the field. Bring the best, of the first fruits, of your soil, to the house, of the Lord, your God.

As I said before, there were already, songs, and worship, and sacrifices, being given, to false gods, in connection, with harvest. That was in Egypt, that was in the, Mesopotamian regions.

But here, God seems to be, reclaiming, and reorienting, those annual celebrations, to himself, for his people.

After all, he is the one, who rules, over all creation, who governs, the natural world. As we heard earlier, he's the one, who sends the rain, and waters the land, and causes the crops, to grow, supplying food, for animals, and for man.

[11 : 42] And so he says, celebrate, these festivals, to me. In other words, bring the first fruits, of the crops, you reap from your field, to me.

To my tabernacle, my temple, when harvest begins. Celebrate to me, all that you have, gathered in, at the end of the harvest.

harvest. That increase, that provision, that you get, at harvest, says the Lord, is my doing. So acknowledge me, give thanks to me, celebrate, my provision, to you.

For Israel, back in those days, on the surface, it might look like, God commandeered, the harvest celebrations, of the nations, around them.

We might even think, in a sense, that he stole, thanksgiving, and harvest celebration, from them. But no, stole, isn't the right word.

[12 : 44] Because the credit, and the thanks, and the praise, for the increase, of the harvest, was always, rightfully his. Right from the start. He took back, among his own people, what already belonged, to him.

In a manner of speaking, he said, it's good, it's right for you, to feast, and to celebrate, at the beginning, and at the end of harvest, giving thanks, for it, to me.

Because what you get, out of the fields, is my good gift, to you. I gave the waters, I gave the rain, I made the plants, I made the sun, I made those plants, grow, I made all the pollinators, it all comes, from me.

And so come, and offer worship, and thanks, to me, at my house, each year. Celebrate, and feast with me, at the tabernacle, each harvest.

When we hear that, being instituted, back in Exodus, at the mountain there, in one sense, it's not too hard, to draw a line, straight from these festivals, to modern day, Thanksgiving.

[13 : 58] If it was good, to feast, and celebrate, the gifts of God, to Israel back then, isn't it good, to feast, and celebrate, the gifts of God today, for us, all over the world.

Even in our modern times, with all our advanced technology, we still eat, what grows, and what lives, on the earth. The plants, and the creatures, that God has made, for food.

food. Were God, to remove, one of the essential, ingredients, that he has supplied, be it rain, water, sunlight, as we heard earlier, everything on earth, would die.

And so, what a fitting thing, it is then, to take a day, or even a whole weekend, to celebrate, God's gracious blessings, to us. He is, worthy, of our thanks, is he not?

Have you ever given somebody, a generous gift, and they take it, from your hand, and yet, surprisingly, show little appreciation, for it?

[15 : 10] Say nothing to you, about it, from then on. Not even a simple, thank you. We almost, feel wronged. Not that we, gave it, in order to get, their thanks, but we saw, their need, or we saw, a desire they had, for what was given, and we just acted, in love, to meet that need.

And maybe, they don't even, look you in the eye, or say thank you. Probably, that's happened, to most of us, at least one time, or another. What is it like, for God then, the one who made us, and gave us, everything good, we have, love, and yet, the people, he has made, on the whole, do not return thanks.

Even worse, attribute, the good things, that he has given, and done, to anyone, but him, anything, but him.

Back, to Israel, for a moment, we could, dig more, into the details, of how those, feasts of harvest, and in gathering, were celebrated. I think, as we do, we would see, that they really, only fit, for Israel, in that time, and place, before Jesus came.

Their society, revolved around, agriculture. Their worship, had the tabernacle, and then later, the temple, at the center, in Jerusalem. Sacrifices, and offerings, were part of those, festivals, bringing, your animals, bringing grain offerings, sacrificing them, to the Lord.

[16 : 51] All of it, was very tangible. A very, physical way, of acknowledging, God is the giver, of the harvest. But as the story, goes on, we also see, that Israel, by and large, did not fulfill, this covenant, obligation, to give thanks, to God, and to worship, him in the way, that he laid out, in this

covenant, at Sinai.

There was a remnant, there were a few, who, had true faith, in God, in each generation, and, and, tried to honor God, as best they could. But as the story, goes on, we watch things, with Israel, sadly, spiral downwards.

Israel chooses, to be unfaithful. God goes so far, as to remove them, from their land, and destroy Jerusalem, and destroy the temple.

He sends them off, as captives, to Assyria, and to Babylon. Even though Israel, had all the reason, in the world, to give thanks to God, and even instruction, about how to do it, it didn't happen much, as it should have.

because the problem, was deeper. Our problem, is a humanity whole, is that we have, an ungrateful heart.

[18:17] Because of sin, we have become, bent away, from giving thanks, to God. Just as Paul said, in the passage, we read earlier, our hearts, have become, darkened, and foolish.

Imagine for a moment, that you give a gift, to someone, and as I said before, they show little appreciation, for it. Maybe they just, shove it in a drawer, and forget about it.

And then you see them, in need again, and you give them, another gift. And they do the same thing, and this cycle, just keeps going on, and on. You're moved, with compassion, for the struggle, that they're going through, a need that they have, and so you, generously give them, something to meet that need.

But they either act, as if they're entitled to it, and got it for themselves, or they ignore the gift, altogether, and don't bother, to do anything with it. Maybe they chuck it, in the value village, donation box.

Well there comes a point, when we naturally feel like, enough is enough, I'm not going to give you, anything more. That's kind of, how things go, between, God and Israel, in the Old Testament.

[19:31] He gives his gifts, again, and again, and again, and it's met, with ungratefulness, met with no response, or worse, they give thanks, and praise, to the false gods, instead of, to him.

And if it was you, or me, we'd probably just get angry, and tired, and say, well that's enough, no more. But amazingly, all through this time, God continued, to promise, the greatest of blessings, in the future, for his people, for those who drew near, to him, by faith.

God was preparing, the ultimate gift. And that gift, of course, we all know, was Jesus, his son. It's really hard, in a few moments, to capture, the greatness, of the gift, that Jesus is, to us.

I was trying to think, of an analogy, and it's probably, not a very good one, but you know how, sometimes you go to the store, to get a new appliance, maybe a crock pot, or something, and what used to be, a crock pot, is now new, and improved.

Now it does 12 things, it's a 12 in one, crock pot, pressure cooker, canner, air fryer, you get the picture. How can we resist, I'm getting 12 in one.

[20:49] Well Jesus, is to us, someone who is, 10,000 in one. 10,000 in one. He's our king.

He's our shepherd. He's our life. He's the light. He's wisdom incarnate. As we were talking about, this morning in Sunday school, he has ultimate authority, and power.

He is gentle, and patient with us. He's our great high priest, representing us to the father. He's the sacrifice, offered to God, that we needed.

He's our savior. He's our redeemer. He's God himself, come in the flesh, to rescue us. And the list could go on, for the rest of the morning. Through the ages, God has been preparing a gift, for the ungrateful.

And the gift is Jesus, and every blessing imaginable, God has purposed, to give us, in and through, Christ Jesus.

[21:54] A new covenant, through Jesus. A new kind of relationship, to God, through Jesus. No more altars, no more sacrifices, no more temple.

In this covenant relationship, God's even promised, to deal with the problem, of our unfaithfulness, and the ungratefulness, in our hearts.

He will fix, what's broken in here, which causes us, to turn away from him. In this covenant, we get forgiveness, of all of our sins, for free.

Jesus pays the cost, and all we need to do, is believe. Under this arrangement, we get a resurrection, from the dead, and life forever, with Christ.

With God, in an eternal kingdom, which is coming. Jesus is the ultimate gift, and this gift, has been given.

[22 : 55] And this changes everything, for us, who believe, and who belong to Christ. God's own spirit, to live in us, is part of, this gift.

And now it's not just, the good stuff of earth, that we have to give thanks for, but the stuff of heaven, as well. Paul says it, this way, in his letter, to the Ephesians, which, we were looking at, this morning.

Praise be to the God, and Father, of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us, in the heavenly realms, with every spiritual blessing, in Christ. He goes on from there, for another ten verses, just to list out, all the spiritual blessings, that we have in Christ.

God has done so much, he has given us so much, in and through Jesus. We can hardly even think, of just having one day, to give thanks, or one weekend.

What God has done for us, in Christ, moves us from a day, of thanksgiving, to a whole life, of thanksgiving. It moves us, from occasional, thanksgiving, to continual, thanksgiving.

[24 : 15] Moment by moment, throughout every day. Let's look quickly, at just a couple places, in the New Testament, where it speaks, of thanksgiving. In this same letter, of Ephesians, chapter five, verse 18, Paul says this, Do not get drunk, on wine, which leads, to debauchery.

Instead, be filled, with the spirit, speaking to one another, with psalms, hymns, and songs, from the spirit, singing, and making music, from your heart, to the Lord.

always, giving thanks, to God the Father, for everything, in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

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Or, we could flip over, to Colossians, 3, verse, 16 and 17. It's a very similar passage, let the message, of Christ, dwell among you richly, as you teach, and admonish one another, with all wisdom, through psalms, hymns, and songs, from the spirit, singing to God, with gratitude, in your hearts, and whatever you do, whether in word, or deed, do it all, in the name, of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks, to God the Father, through him.

So not just for everything, but in everything, whatever you do, any situation, whether you're opening your mouth, to speak, or doing a deed, some kind of action, it's a time, for giving thanks to God, through Jesus.

[25 : 59] 1 Thessalonians 5, verse 18. Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks, in all circumstances, for this, is God's will, for you, in Christ Jesus, in all circumstances, and one more, Philippians, 4, verse 6, do not be anxious, about anything, but in every situation, by prayer, and petition, with, thanksgiving, present, present your request, to God, and the peace of God, which transcends, all understanding, will guard your hearts, and your minds, in Christ Jesus.

I hope what we see, through all of those, is that thanksgiving, is to be a part of, our lives, everything, in our lives, we're to give thanks, for everything, we're to give thanks, in every situation, and circumstance, even in our, anxiousness, our worries, our stress, pray, and ask God, for what you need, with thanksgiving.

there's nowhere, in the New Testament, where Christ's people, are commanded to, feast on a particular day, at harvest, or to observe, a special day, of giving thanks, it's not a, Christian holiday, in the sense, that it's right in the Bible, in fact, we're prohibited, from requiring people, to observe, particular days, or feasts, these kinds of things, God leaves up, to the individual, and to each family, to do according to, conscience, between them, and God, we have freedom, in Christ, to worship, and give thanks, in a variety of ways, we could have a church, banquet, and kill the fattened calf, or not, we could gather with family, or not, because of the spiritual blessings, that we have in Christ, we need not be rich, or have had a great, and prosperous year, to give thanks, we can give thanks, in all kinds of ways, even if we're hard pressed, or going through, the worst of times, the important thing, is that however, we choose to celebrate, thanksgiving, we do it to the Lord, we do it to the Lord, celebrate to me, these festivals, and I think it should, look and feel, different, for us as Christians, to celebrate, thanksgiving, than for people, who don't believe in God, shouldn't there be, some verbal acknowledgement, of God, in our celebrations, of the things, he has given and done, shouldn't there be, some mention, of the spiritual blessings, which are ours in Christ, in our celebrations, if there isn't, then what are we celebrating, and who are we giving thanks to, are we at the gathering, just for the food, just for the family, or are we there, for the one, who has fed us, all our lives, with daily bread, are we gathered, because it's tradition, or because our God, is worthy of celebration, for all he has given and done, now I know, that doesn't always make it easy, when it

comes to, being invited over, to the house of, someone else, for thanksgiving, maybe they're not a Christian, maybe they're not celebrating, the same thing that you are, when you gather with them, you may even choose, to pass on a gathering, if it's little more, than a time to get together, and gorge, and get drunk, that certainly doesn't, honor Christ, this is where we need wisdom, from the Lord, and we can ask him for it, but let's not, whatever we do, whatever we choose, however we mark this occasion, let's not allow the world, or the wicked, to keep us from giving thanks, and celebrating in some way, the God who has, given us our daily bread, and who has given us, the ultimate gift, his son, we have so much, to give thanks for, and so let nothing, stop us, let's pray, Lord Jesus, we're mindful, of the brokenness, in our world, and, many who do not, acknowledge you, as they should, especially, at this time of year, and maybe, some of us, even are, are headed over, to someone's house, later today, or tomorrow, to be with them, and, we feel that tension, in the relationship, we pray, and ask for your help, help us to be people, who proclaim, and declare, you, acknowledge you, as the giver, of all good, who point, others to you, sometimes that's hard, Lord, sometimes people, don't want to hear it again, give us courage, give us boldness, you deserve the praise, you deserve the credit, pray this in Jesus name, Amen.