'Give Grateful Praise

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Preacher: Andrew Price

[0:00] My daughter's Year 12 valedictory dinner. And it's celebrated with Thanksgiving, the end of all our kids' schooling,!

As well. Is that right, Jason? Yes. But we were told as the kids came up to get an award just to give one clap, because there's like 140-something of them.
But some parents just couldn't help themselves. They were so excited. They were shouting for joy, whether that was by clapping and cheering, even some fist-pumping. The parents who were next to us, where we were sitting, were jumping up and down when their child was named.
It was incredible. Some even cheered in their own language, like the Chinese language. Is it Gongqi, Gongqi? Is that right? No? Anyway, I was told that was right.
Anyway. Well, the kids as well were celebrating with Thanksgiving, because the end of schooling meant freedom and sleep-ins. They were very excited about that as well. And I too was shouting for joy, although much more civilised, just some clapping.
[1:25] And I had a side fist-pump, you know, not on the air. And I was celebrating with Thanksgiving, not just the end of my daughter's schooling, but even more importantly, the end of school fees.

No more fees. It was very exciting. At the point is, last Monday night, parents and kids celebrated with Thanksgiving in different ways, the end of their schooling.
And in our psalm today, it's a psalm for... Oh, there was some African ladies. Yep. A psalm for giving grateful praise.
And this heading is part of the original text. This is the title that the psalmist himself gave this psalm. In other words, it celebrates with Thanksgiving, not just the end of schooling, but the character and work of our great God.
And in fact, God is so worthy of Thanksgiving, the psalm actually repeats itself. And so let's... Quick overview. In verses 1 and 2, we have three commands or imperatives to give thanks in different ways, followed in verse 3, with some reasons why to give thanks.
[2:36] And then the psalm repeats. So in verse 4, are another three commands about giving thanks, followed in verse 5, with some more reasons why. And this repetition makes the point that our God really is worthy of our grateful praise.

And so it's right that we pause to give thanks. Point 1, verse 1. The psalmist says, shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.
Here is the first of those three imperatives to begin with. To shout for joy or rejoice. Now, I know most of us don't like to show too much emotion, unless our sports team wins and everyone else is getting psyched around us.
But it is okay to rejoice out loud with Thanksgiving. I mean, have you ever lost something like your phone or your AirPods? AirPods?
And, you know, after panicking and searching, you finally remember to start praying. And then they turn up in some weird or wonderful place, like the washing basket or the fridge or wherever it is.
[3:45] And it's such a great relief. You finally got them. Why not at that point? Let out a joyful, oh, thank you, God. Or when you get that last car parking spot or those good test results or an answer to prayer, it's okay to let out a joyful, thank you, God.

After all, non-Christians do it all the time, don't they? In a unbelieving way. You know, you hear it in movies, you hear it at work or at school, they go, oh, thank God this or thank God that in an unbelieving way.
Well, why not reclaim that in a believing way and say, thank you, God, out loud? This is one way we're to give thankful praise, as is verse two, to worship the Lord with gladness.

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Now, the word worship in the NIV, it's literally in the original Hebrew, serve the Lord. We're to serve the Lord. And notice it says with gladness.
Sometimes we can serve God with groaning. Can't we? You know, like when you realise it's your turn on the roster to serve or even on the HTY roster to clean up in the kitchen.
[5:01] Having done that a couple of times myself, you know, when it's your turn, you can very easily let out, oh, yeah, that's right, a groan of resignation. But we're to serve God with gladness rather than groaning.

Because this is part of our thankfulness to God, part of our thankful response to who he is and what he's done for us, as we'll soon see. And it's been so encouraging to hear people do this.
People have said to me, especially in light of Jeff's passing, if there's anything more we can do, we're happy to help. Gladness serving.
Or I remember looking for some Bible readers at our 7.45am service, which is very early on a Sunday morning, and one lady offered, adding, it is such a joy to read God's word, serving with gladness.
And this is another way to express our thanks to God, as is the rest of verse 2, coming before him with joyful songs. You see, songs have both music and words, right?
[6:08] And the music engages the emotions of our heart, and the words carry the thoughts of our heads or minds, and so together, music and words, which make up a song, help express our thanks and praise with both our heads and hearts.

And this really hit home to me when we sang at the combined 5pm service a few weeks ago, the Sunday after Jeff passed in this room, and many of you were there, you might remember, I spoke on 1 Corinthians 15 about the hope we have because of Christ's death and resurrection, and then we sang that song, Christ my hope in life and death.
And it was partly because of the occasion, but you could hear it engage everyone's head and heart because it lifted the roof of this place in thankful praise to God.
For the hope he's given us in Christ. Coming before God with joyful songs expresses thanks and praise with both our heads and hearts, you see. And so as parents and kids gave grateful praise last Monday night in different ways, whether by clapping or cheering, so we're to give grateful praise to God in different ways, like rejoicing or serving or singing.
But why? Well, point to verse 3. Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us and we are his. We are his people, the sheep of his pasture.
[7:38] Now, in verse 1 and 2, so also in verse 3, the word Lord is in capitals, isn't it? And that's because it's the personal name of God, literally Yahweh.

Yahweh. And it's the name God gave his people back in the Exodus through Moses that helped them differentiate between him and all the other gods around at the time or still around today.
And so it's saying, know this Yahweh is God. In other words, know that our God is the true God.
And that's worth giving thanks for because it means we've got the real deal.
It's a bit like those medical trials. Sometimes a group of patients is given the real drug while another group of patients is given the placebo or the fake drug.
So doctors can kind of get a sense of how effective this new real drug is. And of course, if it is effective, if it is good, then the group of patients who got the real deal rejoice because it saves them, right?
[8:45] Well, we've got the real God who saves us, not some placebo gods who don't. And so we're not wasting our time being here in this room or following God in our lives.

You see, knowing the Lord is the true God really is a reason to give thanks because we know we're on the right track as is the fact that he made us, verse 3.
He made us when he created us and all people. And that's why the psalmist says back in verse 1 there, it says, tells all the earth to shout for joy because God created all the earth.
And so, all the earth owes him their lives. Occasionally, I'll remind my kids to be more thankful to their mother. And I sometimes add, after all, she gave birth to you.
You owe her your life. Well, how much more so God, who enables mothers to give birth in the first place and who enables our lungs to keep breathing, including that breath you just took then.
[9:53] You see, we owe him everything and so, shouldn't we thank him? And even more so for us who are Christians for he didn't just make us as people, he made us his people.

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Verse 3 goes on to say, we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Being the sheep of his pasture makes us his special people and it makes him our shepherd.
A bit like that famous Psalm 23, remember how it starts off, the Lord is my shepherd. Yeah. It goes on to say, I should not be in want for the things that I need.
And it explains why. For God provides for his people's needs. Just as a shepherd provides for sheep, leading to them to green pastures and beside quiet waters for food and drink.
And he guides us down the paths of righteousness in life. He even abides or stays with us through life so that when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we need not fear for he is with us and to bring us through whatever we face and even through death to life again.
[11:02] All this is because he made us not just as people but his special people. The sheep of his pasture and he without being our shepherd.

Of course, this is fulfilled in Jesus who is our shepherd as we heard in our second reading who laid down his life for us to pay for our sins so that everyone who believes in Jesus can be forgiven and then given a place amongst his special people with life eternal.
This is an extraordinary gift and worthy of our grateful praise, isn't it? Our new Archbishop is taking a group of people to the UK next year in May on a junket, I mean a research trip, research trip, that's what it is, and he invited me to go to, which surprised me and made me feel kind of special. When I told my wife Michelle she was very jealous and wanted to come to, I mean a trip to the UK, what an extraordinary gift. Then I read further down the email and saw that I had to pay for it all.
Not quite an extraordinary gift, but Jesus gives us more than a trip to the UK, he gives us life eternal. In a perfect world to come where we'll be able to travel the whole world for free because he paid for our sins with his own life.
[12:33] And that really is an extraordinary gift, isn't it? Worthy of our grateful praise. And in case we don't get it, the psalmist repeats it, again telling us to give thanks.

Point three, verse four, enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise, give thanks to him and praise his name. These are commands. To enter, to give thanks, to praise.
Now entering gates and courts is talking about entering the temple gates and the temple courts that used to be in Jerusalem when this psalm was written. Even back in verse two where it says, come before him in joyful songs, it meant come before him at the temple.
For that is where God dwelt by his spirit. Of course today, that's all that is left of the temple in Jerusalem, just one western war. And that's actually okay.
It doesn't need to be rebuilt because Jesus replaced the temple. You might remember in John's gospel, he talks about that, how his body is the temple.
[13:45] He is the one we had to go to to meet God, you see. The one who perfectly represents God. But as we believe in Jesus, we are also spiritually united to him so that we become part of that temple and God's spirit dwells in us.

And since we're always united to Jesus, then we always have God's spirit with us, anytime, anywhere. Which means we can come before God with thanksgiving and praise anytime, anywhere.
But the question is, do we? Because we're supposed to. I mean, in verse 4, have you noticed how even this one verse repeats itself? You know, entry his gates with thanksgiving, courts with praise, and then the third line again repeats, give thanks and praise.
And so do we. Do we give thanks when we sit down to eat? Or every time we pray for things, do we thank him for things? things?
Or do we give thanks when we get through a difficult time? You know, we might pray when we face trouble in life, but then do we thank God after he's brought us through that trouble in life?
[15:02] In fact, when the power went out earlier today, I hooked up a lead to my place, I was going to bring it across, and then I was doing this and thought, hang on, I think I mentioned my sermon tonight, I should stop and pray.

So I prayed, you know, please restore the power. We were told it was going to come back on at 7.30, and that's a bit too late for 5 o'clock church, right? So I prayed, and then I walked back, and I heard everyone go, woo!
Power came back on. And I went, oh! And I was kind of surprised it worked that quickly, like God answered that prayer so quickly. And so it wasn't until, you know, maybe 10 minutes later, I sat down, I went, oh, hang on, I should have thanked God for answering that prayer.

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And so I thank God there and there. That's what we do, don't we? We face trouble, we pray about it eventually, and then we get through it, we kind of just move on and forget to thank him. But we are to thank him.
Or even if something good happens in life, we are to give praise and praise his name. To praise his name just means talking about how good he is to others, like we'll do later in the service as we share points of thanksgiving.
[16:12] This is what we're supposed to do. more than that, we have plenty of reason to. Like we saw before, we know our God is the true God, he's the real deal.

And he made us and gave us life such that we owe him our lives. And he even made us his special people, the sheep of his pasture, with life eternal.
We have plenty of reason to thank him. But again, just in case we don't get it, the psalmist repeats it with more reason. Point four, verse five. For the Lord is good.
His love endures forever. His faithfulness continues through all generations. You see, not only is he the real God, he is a good God.
Goodness is his nature. It is who he is, which means he's incapable of being bad. I know sometimes we can doubt God's goodness when we see such badness in our world or suffer badness in our lives.
[17:18] We've all experienced that. I mean, the week before Jeff passed, I was in New South Wales conducting my own brother's funeral because my brother died unexpectedly.

And so at those times when we suffer badness, it's very easy to doubt God's goodness. But he's not capable of doing bad. He's not responsible for that badness. It's the world we live in that's fallen because of sin.
Rather, he can only do good because he is good. And that's really reassuring. It's a bit like that famous verse in Romans 8, 28, we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.
Even if we can't see it at the time, even if it's hard to accept that our greatest good is at the end there to be conformed to the likeness of his son Jesus.
But God always works for our good because God is good. And so is that not a reason to thank him? Indeed, in verse 5, God's goodness is then shown in terms of his love and faithfulness, his love that endures forever and his faithfulness that continues through all generations, which basically means it endures forever as well.
[18:39] And we only have to look at Jesus to see the truth of this. You see, as you know, Jesus is God's one and only son, the one who is most precious to him. And so if there was ever a time when God would not do good, ever a time when God would choose not to love, ever a time when God would not be faithful, it would be the time when he had to give up his one and only son.

And yet when the time came, God graciously gave, didn't he? And Jesus willingly went. Jesus, who's not just our shepherd, but the good shepherd, because he willingly laid down his life for us.
And the point is, if God did such good for us, if God so loved us, if he kept his promises to us, even when it cost him his one and only son, then we can be certain he'll continue.
That no matter what happens in life, God still loves us. That no matter what happens in life, God will still keep his promises to us. That no matter what happens in life, God will still do good for us, which is ultimately to make us like the greatest person who ever lived, Jesus.
I remember hearing the testimony of someone who had an extremely difficult life. He grew up in a Christian family, but then things went pear-shaped. He suffered a severe injury, which meant he lost his job and couldn't find other work.
[20:11] His wife couldn't cope, and so she abandoned him. And it got to the point where he wanted to take his own life. He even managed to get a gun to do it.

But as he sat in his room, gun in his hand, a Sunday school song popped into his head. It was that song, Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.
And he realized that God's love still endured for him, even though his wife's love had stopped. He realized that God is still good towards him, even though others were not.
And he realized that if God gave his only son for him, it meant God would keep all his other promises too. Not to give him an easy life, God does not promise us an easy life, but he does promise to help us through this life, to enjoy life eternal in the world to come.

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And so this man turned back in faith and with great thanksgiving for that song about Jesus who still loved him, saved his life both physically and spiritually.
[21:24] no matter how bad life gets, we always have plenty of reason to give grateful praise to God. And so will we?

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