

# Advent Mission Give Thanks To The LORD

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Preacher: Harry Robinson

[ 0 : 00 ] Our God and Father, you have promised that as we draw near to you, you will draw near to us. As we turn our minds and our hearts to your written word, we ask that you will turn to us in love and forgiveness and renewing, and that the seed of your word sown in our hearts might bring forth life.

We ask this in Christ's name. Amen. I'd like you to turn to page 536 in the Bible that is in your pew. Amen. And I'd like you to read with me the first verse of Psalm 107.

Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. Turn back to Psalm 106 on page 534 and read the first verse there.

Praise the Lord. Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

[ 1 : 44 ] And then turn ahead to Psalm 118. And verse 1. And we'll read it again. Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Now, having been through that practice, don't look at anything and see if you can say it. Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Well done. And I hope as you go on your way home, that that verse may be echoing in your mind and heart, and that if you would tie the very focus of our week together, beginning now, around that verse, to give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy is steadfast love endures forever.

It begins with a very simple command, that you are to give thanks to the Lord. Now, giving thanks is a lovely thing to be able to do.

One of the bitter complaints of an atheist I once heard of was that even when he felt like it, there was no one to whom he could give thanks.

[ 3 : 09 ] And that is certainly a very real human predicament. Yesterday was a very sad day, in a way, for us at St. John.

At a memorial service for Stuart Gibson, who, at 24 years of age, died of a brain tumor after a protracted illness. And it was the strange and wonderful request of the family that the service which was held here should be called a celebration of thanksgiving for the life of Stuart Gibson.

And it was entirely appropriate that it should be a celebration of thanksgiving. And it may not occur to you why it should be.

And that's why I want you to listen. To listen as we work our way this week through the whole of Psalm 107. And to find reason why you should give thanks to the Lord.

If I was to ask you to stop for a moment right now and think about what you should give thanks for, what would you do?

[ 4 : 30 ] Stop a moment and see. Just review in your mind what it is that you should give thanks for. And as you review those things in your mind, I wonder if you understood yet the first verse of Psalm 107.

What it says when it says give thanks to the Lord is to give thanks to the Lord for being the Lord.

You may have no other reason in the whole of your life to give thanks to the Lord.

You may have a catalog of fear and failure and agony and disappointment and frustration and bitterness and paranoia, which may be a great big compacted reality, which is right at the center of your life.

And you say, for this I should give thanks. And I say, no, you don't have to give thanks for that. Give thanks to the Lord for he is good.

And the meaning being that no matter what the circumstances of your life are, there is reason to give thanks to the Lord. That's what it says.

[ 5 : 54 ] And it says it to the people of God wherever they are and under whatever circumstances they find themselves, no matter what overtakes them, no matter what misfortune catches hold of

them, no matter whether they find themselves slaves or imprisoned or at the point of death, no matter whether they find themselves in captivity, the one thing that they are commanded to do in the midst of it is to give thanks to the Lord that he is the Lord, to give thanks to him for whom he is. We've got to learn that. The second thing I want to tell you about this passage is that it talks about the Lord. And if you look at it in your Bible, you will see that it's spelt capital L, capital O, capital R, capital D.

And that's because it's not a word like, you know, an earl in the English court.

It's not Lord this or Lord that. It is the Lord. And that is the name by which he has revealed himself to us.

He has told us what his name is. And that's the first reason that we need to give thanks to him, because he has told us what his name is.

[ 7 : 28 ] He is not, as philosophers might describe him, and rightly so, the union of absolute power and absolute good.

That just remains a philosophical concept or principle. He is a person who has made himself known to us.

When Moses said, what is your name? He said, my name is the Lord. He introduced himself to us in order that we may have a relationship to him.

and in order that we may live in that relationship to God. So, the first reason we have to give thanks to God is that he has made himself known to us in all the whole span of the circumstances of our lives.

Second thing it says about him is that he is good. Now, we, I don't think, understand how good is used in the Bible, because we live in a world where there are a lot of good things.

[ 8 : 49 ] We often say, I know a lot of good people who never go to church. I have a very good car.

I have a good fishing rod. I have a good investment. And we keep talking about good as though, like the Greeks thought about it, goodness was something which was contained in the thing itself. But the Bible never uses goodness that way. Goodness never belongs to the thing. Goodness always belongs to God.

So that when the rich young ruler comes along to Jesus Christ and says, good master, what must I do to inherit eternal life? Christ says, why do you call me good?

There is none good, save God alone. That's the only source of goodness. There is no other goodness in our world.

[ 9 : 55 ] There may be fine qualities, and there may be excellences, and there may be things that compared to other things are good. There may be all sorts of things that we look at that way.

But the Bible doesn't look at goodness that way. And when it says, give thanks to the Lord for he is good, it means that he is, and he alone is good.

And there is no good in our world which does not derive its goodness from him. That's why we have trouble with scripture.

I suggested to Mr. Norman that during the course of the week, we sing a lovely old hymn which I like, but which he turned down, and if you're angry about it, speak to him.

And it was, Come ye sinners, poor and wretched. And he suggested that most of you would not like to think of yourselves as sinners, poor and wretched, so that you shouldn't be asked to stand up and say that, or have that addressed to you.

[ 11 : 09 ] Well, the reason that the Bible does that all the time is simply because it says, goodness is that which is God and which derives from him.

It does not come from us. There is none good save God only. And that's why Paul, in the seventh chapter of the epistle to the Romans, describes the acute agony of what it is to be a human being. And his conclusion is expressed in these words, which I hope are burned into your mind. He says, I know that nothing good dwells in me that is in my flesh.

I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.

Now, you see, what he's getting at here is that when he looks at himself, when he examines who he is, he says, there is no goodness in me.

[ 12 : 29 ] It just isn't there. What's more, it will never be there. The goodness is entirely with God. And he said, the agony of being a human being is that I can know what is good, but I am not good.

I can will to do what is good, but I can't do it. Well, that's how Paul understands himself.

In me dwells no good thing. So if there's an answer to the human problem, it's not in me. And that's what goes so much against the society which we live in, which is determined to demonstrate that at the root of every human personality, there is an essential quantity of goodness that just needs to be brought out.

The Bible says, there is not. And left to himself, man will always mess up because there is no good in him.

The goodness derives from God. And if there is to be any goodness in our lives, it will come out of our relationship to him. And that's why Paul, in the exquisite and articulate expression of the terrible human agony that I know what's good, but I can't do it, says, who is going to deliver me from this?

[14:04] I thank God, he says, that deliverance is in Jesus Christ. That God imparts his goodness to us when we come into relationship with him.

And without relationship to him, there is no goodness. You know that the concept of goodness that we have, for the most part, comes, I think, from Greek philosophy.

That's where we have the picture of the excellence of things, in and of and by themselves. But you know that the word good doesn't come from Greek, and it doesn't come from Latin.

It doesn't come from that source at all. And that's perhaps why somebody has pointed out that if you drop out one O, you know where goodness comes from.

That it comes from God. And unless we are living in relationship to him, there is no goodness in our lives. Here you can look around and see that you're better than the next guy.

[15:18] You can look around and see that you've made more money, you've accomplished more, you've done more for your neighbors. And all those kinds of goodnesses that we describe in human and relative terms.

But in you and me, there is no goodness. And that's why we're asked in the psalm to say, give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.

And he is the source of goodness. And goodness breaks into our lives as we relate to him. Well, the next thing it says is that his steadfast love endures forever.

He is the God, the perfect union of goodness and power who has made himself known to us as the Lord.

He is the only source of goodness. And his steadfast love endures forever.

[16:29] Against all our rebellion and all our unfaithfulness and all our running away from him. He's the God who is not going to give up on us.

He's not going to do it because his steadfast love endures forever. And as we go through Psalm 107, we will see that when you are wandering in defiance and disobedience in the desert, his steadfast love endures forever and pursues you.

When you are in prison and in the darkness of death, his steadfast love endures forever. When you are sick and foolish, destroying yourself by your own disobedience, his steadfast love endures forever.

When you are overwhelmed by the circumstances and give up entirely, his steadfast love endures forever.

That's why you are asked to give thanks to the Lord for he is good because his steadfast love endures forever. The trouble we have in our society with divorce, for instance, is that a relationship between a man and a woman is meant to express in very human terms the reality of the relationship between us and God.

[18:08] And that relationship is marked by a God whose steadfast love endures forever. And we are running away from the terrible reality of that because it's too much for us.

We can't cope with that. We try and escape from the terrible reality. And we pass different forms of legislation whereby we say, I can endure this much or I could endure this much or I could endure this much but I can endure no more.

I can't put up with it any longer. I'm through. I'm finished. And so the breakdown starts to take place in the very fiber of our society.

Well, God never comes to that point with you and me. No matter how unfaithful, how stubborn, how rebellious we may be, God doesn't give up.

He continues to be the source of goodness and in relationship to Him we can find that goodness for ourselves.

[ 19 : 33 ] Well, this week is really a week to talk about a way back into a right relationship with God. That's where it must all begin.

And that applies to you and to me and to strangers and visitors and to the alienated and the hurt and the defiant and the angry and the people who are just so hurt by life that they don't know which way to turn.

It applies to us all that we need to find our way back into a right relationship with God who is good, who has made His name known to us and whose steadfast love endures forever.

And the way back is this, very simply. And may God grant by His Holy Spirit that we in this congregation find this way back through this week.

And that's not something we will all do corporately. We'll do it individually. And the first step is repentance. And repentance means simply that you're prepared to change your lifestyle.

[ 21 : 06 ] to look at life differently. And the fundamental difference is that the goodness is not going to come from here.

No matter how much of it you may think that is in there, it's not going to come from there. And all you will do by trying to find that is end up in the frustration that Paul describes, in me there is no good thing.

If there is to be good in the world, it's not going to come from here. You have to change the way you look at life and recognize that it can come from God only.

You see, if you're good and God isn't, as most people suspect the true situation is, and that's why they avoid Him, it's hard, isn't it, that there are so many people that consider themselves to be good and doubt that God is.

And they just don't know. And they don't know the hurt they do and the damage they do because they don't know where the source of goodness is and they're not living in relationship to that source.

[ 22 : 41 ] So you have to change your way of life. You change your way of looking at life and that's repentance. And may God grant to us the gift of repentance because even that is His gift.

It's not something we do. God would move on you by His Holy Spirit and on me and bring us to a place where we recognize this. If God is good and you are not, there's hope in the world.

If you're living in a world where you think you're good and God isn't, God help us. The second thing you've got to do is to believe. And to believe means what you do, how you live your life, what you live your life by.

Turn those two words around, by life, and you come around to believe. I live my life by faith in God who has created me.

I live my life by faith in Jesus Christ who died for me. I live my life by faith in the Holy Spirit who indwells me and indwells us as the people of God.

[ 24 : 01 ] Belief is life by. And those three things, those two things, to change your way of looking at life, to live by faith in God, not to have mental assent to it, but to live by it moment by moment, and to obey means to come to the place where what you want most is in fact what God wants for you.

And the experiment of the obedience of faith brings you to the place where recognizing what you want most is recognizing simultaneously what God wants for you.

And that's what obedience leads to. each night of the mission there's going to be an epilogue service over there in the chapel.

And in that chapel you are going to be asked to consider what it means to repent, to believe, and to obey.

and you're going to be asked to say a prayer in which by faith you enter into relationship with the God who is the Lord, who is good, and whose steadfast love endures forever.

[ 25 : 32 ] in one of George MacDonald's books there is an old Scottish laird who has lived the whole of his life in rebellion against God and in defiance of God and someone who loves him very much brings to him a man who is to minister to him in his dying hour.

and the old Scottish laird says he can't believe. He can't put his trust in God because God has so badly failed him in his life.

And then he's reminded of the wife that God had given him and the love which had been shown through her. And he comes to the place where he's ready to think about a change in the way he looks at life.

And he's ready to make an important step. And he says to the man what am I to do? What can I do?

And the man says keep the commandment. And the poor old laird just about dies of apoplexy right then.

[ 26 : 54 ] how does a man lying in his deathbed keep the commandments? He says the chief of the commandments for you right now is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

To put your faith in him in obedience to his command. God will be there. And that's what it's all about.

That's where the change comes. It comes when we've lived a life of defiance perhaps of God and we come to the point where we put our faith in Jesus Christ.

God will be blessed. I am asking you that right now. But I pray God may ask you that in a hundred ways through this week.

And that you may be led to the renewal of a faith which you once had. To find a faith that you never had. Through repentance and God's forgiveness to come in again to a place where you can with all your heart, no matter what the circumstances of your life may be, you can with all your heart give thanks to the Lord for he is good and he alone is good and his love endures and endures and endures.

[ 28 : 47 ] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.