

Give Thanks To God For All His Benefits

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[0 : 00] Two things happen when a congregation gets a little large. The old principle of the ninety and nine, they tend to make so much noise that the lost sheep get even lost.

And that's why it's important that all of you are engaged in the business of finding the lost sheep. And that's why we have a visitation program at the end of the month that I hope you're all going to take part in, in one respect or another.

Another thing that makes this morning's service special is that in our offering this morning, we're going to offer our pledge cards for the financial support of ministry in and through this church during 1990.

And I hope you've come prepared for that. And if you haven't, I hope you will make other arrangements that are suitable to you. Following the service this morning, there is going to be an epilogue service in the chapel.

That's right over there. And that's going to be ten minutes after the postlude concludes. And it's going to last about twenty minutes. And in it, two ways to live will be presented.

[1 : 23] There are two reasons you might be interested. One is, if you have a friend who comes to you and says, how do I become a Christian? You say, well, you recognize there are two ways to live, and you choose one of them.

Probably the different one than you're living right now. And so you might want to know how to do that. On the other hand, you might be such a person as has spent a lot or a little time at church and not be really sure what being a Christian means.

And you want to know. And so the chapel service is meant for you as well. But you might know what the choice is that's involved in our increasingly complex world, what's involved in being a Christian. So two ways to live in the chapel ten minutes after the postlude. Now, this is the first Sunday in November, and you'll need to take your prayer book to figure out where we're going and what we're doing.

And if you turn to the very beginning of morning prayer on page four, you'll see how the sermons for the month of November were put together.

[2 : 41] They were put together from the exhortation. Now, this is the prayer book. The original sort of author and editor of the prayer book was Thomas Cranmer.

Thomas Cranmer was born 500 years ago this year, and so we're sort of commemorating him by looking at what he prepared and gave to us, the heritage we have from him, the heritage for which he died at the stake in Oxford.

The passage I want you to look for is paragraph two of the passage that begins, Dearly Beloved Brethren. Do you see that on page four?

There it is. It says, We ought at all times humbly to acknowledge our sins before God. Yet ought we most chiefly so to do when we assemble and meet together, and then the four sermons for November begin, this morning, to render thanks for the great benefits that we have received at his hands.

That's the first thing we're to do when we meet together. The second thing we do when we meet together is to set forth his most worthy praise.

[4 : 03] And we have Trinity Western helping us do that this morning. The third thing for the third Sunday in November will be to hear his most holy word.

How we do that. And the fourth Sunday in November will be to ask those things which are requisite and necessary as well for the body as the soul.

So those are the four topics for the November sermons. And I begin this morning with the one which says, You are to render thanks for the great benefits that we have received at his hands.

Now, what I would like to do to you, I mean, what I really trust this service does for you, is to render to you an account, the money that you owe, the thing that you owe.

You are hopelessly in debt to God. And if you were to take all the moments of all the days that remain to you, and to spend the whole of them in seeking to repay this debt, you would not begin to. [5 : 19] Such is the debt of thankfulness that we owe to God. So to understand what it means, a bill has been rendered to you when we tell you of the gospel of Jesus Christ and Christ's death on the cross.

You see how much you owe. Remember that lovely hymn where the whole realm of nature mind that were an offering far too small. Love so amazing, so divine, demands my life, my soul, my all. So you are hopelessly in debt. But you have wonderful resources to call on. And that's what you have to do, is to call on those resources by which you might render to God thanks for the great benefits that he has bestowed upon you.

I visited a man who was terminally ill with cancer last night, late last night, and said to him, If I have to preach on Thanksgiving tomorrow morning, what have you got to be thankful for? And he said that I'm still here. And so I don't think you will ever come to the end of the responsibility that you have to give thanks.

[6 : 43] Thanks. This occurred to me on the way to church this morning, and it's hopelessly corny, but it may help you to get hold of what we're doing today, what we're doing here.

You know that when some great company has a great project in mind, they bring together all their leading researchers, and they take them apart for a few days, and they have a think tank. That is, they exhaust their brains trying to think how to deal with a particular problem. Well, you see it coming?

Anyway, we are gathered together as a think tank. One... And we have enormous resources on which we can call among ourselves in order to give expression to the thanks that we owe. And I want you to search your heart as think tanks search the mind, so think tanks are to research, to search the heart, to see how much reason you have to give thanks.

[8 : 02] Now, the passages, and the reason that... the way this is put together, and if you look at... if you look at the Bible study for next week in here, for November the 5th, you'll see the quotations from Scripture.

Well, I have an old, old book. You know, not this one, but another one I have at home. The covers come off it. But it has all the words of the prayer book just written down the margins. And then where those marginal references are, there's paragraphs of scriptural references to which the prayer book refers in saying things like, to render thanks for the great benefits that we have received at his hands.

So that the texts which belong to this word from the prayer book, the texts from which this is derived, which Cranmer wove together into this exhortation, are these.

[9 : 15] There's Psalm 100, verse 4, and 1 Chronicles 16, verse 8 and 9, and Psalm 103, verse 2 and 3, and Psalm 35, verse 18.

You may want to write those down, but I'll come to them. Now, what I want to do is just ask these questions. And the first question I want to ask is, how do we render thanks?

And if you were to turn to 1 Chronicles, chapter 16, verse 8 and 9, you will see what David said to the people who were part of his kingdom when they brought the Ark of the Covenant into Zion, the city of David.

He said to them, give thanks... See, this is 1 Chronicles 16, verse 8 and 9. He said to them, Give thanks unto the Lord, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the people, sing unto him, sing psalms unto him, talk ye of all his wondrous works.

So how do we render thanks? We render thanks by calling upon his name. We render thanks by making known his deeds among the people.

[10 : 41] We render thanks by singing unto him. And having Trinity Western Choir to come and help us do it. And by singing psalms unto him.

And by talking of all his wondrous works. You see, what we do is we become very much aware of who God is and how he is at work among us.

And that's why we call on his name. And that's why we make known his deeds among the people. The people may not want to know them. But nevertheless, it's our responsibility.

In fact, the whole evangelistic thrust of having a mission here in January is to make known in this community and to this congregation, and even wider if possible, to make known his deeds among the people.

People need to know what God has done and is doing. And part of our thankfulness is in making known his deeds, in celebrating them, so that people will know what God has done and what God is doing.

[12:00] I, you know, I don't know where singing would be or even where music would be apart from the Christian faith. And the business man has of making a joyful noise unto the Lord.

Singing is so much a part of Christian worship. It's so woven into Christian worship. I mean, where else do you sing in the course of the week unless you sing O Canada at the Canada Club luncheon on noon on Wednesday?

You're not liable to be called on to sing at any other time in the week until you come to church and then you spend half your time doing it. And that's appropriate because that's one way that we give thanks unto God is singing unto him and talking of all his wondrous works.

Well, if you look a little ahead in this passage, the passage from 1 Chronicles, you'll see that what David did was he gave bread, meat, and a cake of raisins to all the people.

That was a gift he gave them. And that was to provide for their immediate bodily necessities in order that they would have the energy and the appetite to give themselves to the praise and worship of God.

[13:26] And that indeed is why we have wedding feasts and why the father of the groom has to lay it on with one prominent lawyer in town who said to me at the wedding reception of a judge's daughter.

He said, well, that's not bad for a judge. He laid it on fairly well. But the expectation is that we will provide all the needs that people have so that they can give themselves to the business of Thanksgiving or that they can celebrate the marriage of my daughter.

I want them to come and I don't want them to worry about food or drink. I'll even supply them with a wedding garment. And all this is done in order that that person may give themselves totally to enjoying themselves at the wedding no matter what their personal circumstances may be.

They may not be able to buy a new suit. They may not be able to buy a loaf of bread. But while they're here, they will be provided for so that they can give themselves to this celebration.

And we are provided for, all of us, with the most expensive feast that could ever be a man in the Holy Communion.

[14:51] To provide for all of us equally. For rich and poor, for the wise man and the fool, for the young and for the old, for everybody, we are provided with this feast which meets all our basic needs so that we can give ourselves to the business of giving thanks.

So that the whole of our life might be a giving of thanks to God. He has wonderfully provided for us as David provided for those who came together to celebrate the return of the Ark of the Covenant into the city of Zion.

Then that's what you're to do. Now, what are the great benefits for which we are to give thanks?

And if you look at Psalm 103, verses 2 to 3, you'll see what are the great benefits.

And they're listed for you there. Remember, Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. In other words, you remember them.

And then it lists what they are. He forgives all your iniquity. He heals all your diseases. He redeems your life from destruction.

[16:11] He crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercy. So those are the benefits that we have at God's hand, that our sins are forgiven.

That's a completed action. That's something that is right here and right now. That's something you don't leave the church this morning without knowing that in your relationship to God, your sins are forgiven.

That's done, accomplished, finished. It's all over with. And if you don't have that sense, then you shouldn't leave church until you do. Because that's the nature of God's forgiveness.

That you are forgiven. And if you're not forgiven and don't appreciate that, then there is a break in your relationship with God until you do. And the assurance that your sins are forgiven is at the very heart of the service of Holy Communion.

The second thing it says is that he heals all your diseases. Well, now, healing doesn't take place as fast as forgiving does sometimes.

[17 : 21] Often there is a process involved in healing. But immediate forgiveness is ours because forgiveness breaks our relationship to God.

Healing sometimes takes longer or even a very long time indeed because suffering tends to strengthen our relationship to God.

That we learn obedience through the things that we suffer. so that God intends that we should even learn in the process of suffering to give thanks, knowing that the God who has made himself known to us in Christ will heal all our diseases and we trust them to him.

So we're forgiven. We are healed of our diseases. He redeems our life from destruction. That means our life is not as it appears to be, something that can be taken away from us, but that he gives us life that can't be taken away from us.

You can't annihilate us because God has saved our life from destruction. Our life is something of eternal value to him.

[18 : 44] And that's why he has given us eternal life. We sometimes treat it as though it had no value at all. But it is a life that God saves from destruction.

Human life potentially is not subject to death because of Jesus Christ. The implications for that are very considerable.

And the fourth benefit that it speaks of is that he crowns us with loving kindness and tender mercy, with love and compassion.

We can know his love and compassion. Just to give you one simple illustration of this, you know how it says, blessed are the poor in spirit.

When I'm talking to you about giving thanks to God, of us being a thank tank, I'm not talking about giving thanks for the fact that you've got a good job or you've got a high income or you've got a nice wife or you've got a nice family.

[19 : 50] I'm talking about the things which if all those things were taken away, you would still have reason to give thanks to God. Those are the things which you need to be most aware of.

And those are the things. That's why he's careful to say to you, he forgives your iniquities, he heals your diseases, he redeems your life from destruction, and he crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercy.

You still have all that when everything else is gone. And so you still have ample reason to be exceedingly thankful.

And if you look in Psalm 35, verse 18, you'll see where you are to worship, and it says you're to worship in the great congregation, you're to worship among much people.

Now the motivation for that, I think, may be similar to what happens when the Rolling Stones come to town, you know, that everybody's got to be there, I just got to be there, you know.

[21 : 00] I don't care what the tickets cost, I don't care how far I have to travel, I don't care how long I have to stand in line, I got to be there. Well, that's the spirit, at least, though I trust the motivation, dangerous ground this, I trust the motivation may be different, and that to be in the great congregation giving thanks to God is the thing we should long for.

We should sell anything in order to be there. We should go into debt. Anything to be there to give thanks. In fact, the very function of this church is to provide a congregation within which all the people of the community can come together to give thanks.

That it's not just a private matter between you and God, it's something that involves everybody here. And where the whole church packed to 30 feet deep with people, all giving thanks to God, that would be entirely appropriate and entirely right, that we should give thanks to God in the great congregation.

We should assemble together to do it. We should do anything we can to be there. And that's what song, that's why we need to recognize this common debt and we need to come together in order to pay it off in giving thanks to God.

And if people have no other motivation than to come to give thanks to God, they should be welcome here because they have come for that reason and learn some of the implications of it, no doubt.

[22 : 40] But, they need to give thanks to God. So, that's the way Thomas Cranmer backs up this thing that we are met together to render thanks to God for all the benefits that we have received at his hands.

Now, there's one verse I haven't touched upon yet and that's from Psalm 100 where it quotes Psalm 100 in saying, enter into his gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise.

And I want just to leave this with you because it is because of Jesus Christ that we can enter into his gates, we can enter into his courts with thanksgiving and with praise.

The gates which were locked to us and the courts which were impassable for us to get to, those have been flung wide open by Jesus Christ so that we can enter into the very presence of God. And if you, and that's why we sing, O be joyful in the Lord all ye lands, serve the Lord with gladness and come into his presence with thanksgiving.

[23 : 57] Enter his gates with praise. All these things are ours because of what Jesus Christ has done. Look will you, and I'll finish with this, but look will you at Hebrews chapter 10 and verse 19 following.

And just so you see how Christ has made available the very throne of God so that we can approach him with our thanks.

Have you got it all? Just read it with me because we can exhort one another as we read verses 19 to 25 of chapter 10.

Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Let us not neglecting to meet together.

[25 : 39] Thanksgiving is a wonderful medicine that people very much need to take large doses of and it's a medicine which is, strangely enough, infectious.

When you meet somebody who is filled with thanksgiving, you can hardly help but becoming thankful yourself. And we have this responsibility one to another to offer to God our whole heart's thanks and I pray that as we enter this thanksgiving service, as every communion service is, that we might infect one another with our thanksgiving to God for the inestimable benefits that he has given us in Jesus Christ.

Amen.