

Thanksgiving Sermon

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Date: 28 November 2019

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[0 : 00] I'll turn for a short time this evening to the book of Psalms and Psalm 111. Psalm 111, let's read again from the beginning and we'll look at the first few verses.

Praise the Lord, I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart in the company of the upright, in the congregation. Great are the works of the Lord studied by all who delight in them.

I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart in the company of the upright, in the congregation. These three Psalms 111, 112, 113 begin in Hebrew with the word Hallelujah.

Wonderful, stunning beginning to any Psalm. And it's translated here, Praise the Lord, which literally of course is what Hallelujah means. So these three Psalms are tied together in many ways by that opening declaration, by that opening statement and that note of praise.

And as you come to 111, 112, they are actually quite like each other in the content, except that in Psalm 111 we find an account of what God is like, and therefore the thanksgiving and the praise is in relation to what God is like.

[1 : 26] In Psalm 112, some of the same words that are used in 111 to describe God are actually used to describe what the godly are like. And so we give thanks to God in relation to the life that he gives his people to live and enables them to live.

So we're looking just at Psalm 111 this evening, and two things from this. First of all, the people who thank God, and then more fully, the God who is thanked by his people.

Because it's really about God that the Psalm mostly has to do, and that obviously is logical because it's as we think about God, as we contemplate, as we indeed study, as it says here in verse 2, the works of the Lord.

It's thereby that we come more and more to be constrained to give him thanks. The more we understand him, the more we understand his works, the more we are indeed led to thank him.

The more cause we find to thank him, as we are gathered here tonight for that purpose. So the people who thank God, and then also the God who is thanked by his people, and the Psalm sets that out in terms of God thanked for his works, and then God thanked for his character.

[2 : 47] So firstly, the people who thank God. And you notice it begins with the word I. That's where thanks always begins. Not in a congregational setting, but in the individual heart.

And as the church of God gives him thanks, as the people of God here in the Old Testament time gathered together to give thanks, so God reminded them, such as here, that thanks begins with our individual thanks to God.

We don't come together relying on somebody else or to join with other people's thanks, though we do so. The source of our thanksgiving is from our own individual hearts.

It has to be the individual first, and then it comes to spread through the congregation together. But if we don't have that heart of praise and thanks to God, then how can we have praise and thanks in a collective sense?

It all comes to the root of our lives individually. But you know, it's also saying, I will give thanks, not just saying, I will give thanks. He's saying, I will give thanks with my whole heart.

[3 : 56] And so the psalmist is very conscious that he needs to take time over the giving of thanks to God. He needs to think about what he's doing when he's giving thanks. He needs to think about what God is like as he gives thanks.

And as he does so, he gives thanks with his whole heart. He gives his whole heart to it. And of course, heart, very often like this, means all our inward faculties spiritually, that they are engaged and exercised in the worship and in the thanksgiving that we give to God.

We give thanks with our minds, with our understanding. We give thanks with our physical voices.

We give thanks with our emotions. They are directed towards and involved in the giving of our

thanks.

We give thanks with our will particularly, because if our will is not engaged at the very foundation of our thanksgiving, neither will our emotions, neither will our voice, neither will our minds, our understanding.

When he says, I will give thanks with my whole heart, you see, it brings together really the sum total of everything that makes up your inner being and mine. So that as you come to contemplate and study the works of God, they come to affect everything within you, or should do as we think about them, as we give time to think about them.

[5 : 16] And so ultimately it leads to giving thanks with our whole heart. Half-hearted thanksgiving, which I'm not suggesting is the case with yourself by any means, but a half-hearted thanksgiving, it's really a contradiction, isn't it?

Thanksgiving almost really assumes the whole heart is involved in it, given what thanksgiving is, and thanksgiving to God.

So here is what he's saying, first of all, I will give thanks, but I will give thanks with my whole heart. And it's something that you and I must always consider as we continue to give thanks to God, that we have our whole heart stirred, that we pray over the thanksgiving of God, the thanksgiving that we give to God, that we pray over that as much as we pray over our understanding of the Word of God, because that is really what it's meant to lead to.

Our listening to sermons, our reading the Word for ourselves, or whatever other matters we use in terms of feeding our minds, this is really the direction that it should take us in, towards the thanking of God, the giving of thanks to our God.

So that's the first thing. The people who thank God begin with the individual. Then it moves on to the company, saying, I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart, but he doesn't say, I will leave it at just the individual.

[6 : 49] I'll do it by myself, and that'll be sufficient. Far from it. He's saying, I will give thanks in the company of the upright, in the congregation. In other words, as we see so often, the Bible emphasizes the importance of being together as God's people, and here it's confined to the matter of thanksgiving.

There's much more to it than that, of course, but he is saying, I will give thanks in the company of the upright. And one thing that should really constrain us to be anxious to be together, to be anxious to come to church services, or wherever else we are able to worship the Lord, one of the things that should constrain us is that we have the opportunity and the privilege there of collectively gathering to give thanks.

Not just on this occasion, but every occasion of worship includes thanksgiving, just as every individual matter of worship between a person and God includes thanksgiving.

So let's think about that as well. And it's important that our young people as well understand these matters for themselves, how important it not only is to themselves, for themselves to give thanks individually to God, to think in their lives every day of what is it that God has given them that should make them give thanks, but also how important it is, how beneficial it is, how much it encourages the older ones when they see young people like they are here this evening joining together to give thanks to God.

I will give thanks in the company of the upright. And we are giving thanks tonight that we have young ones in our company, that they belong to us as a congregation, that they are meaningfully part of the congregation, that they are here as in their young days giving attention to the things of the gospel, of God, of worship, of his church.

[8 : 52] So it's in the company of the upright. And in fact, that word is used, it's not really different in a sense to congregation, although it's different in the nuance or the sense of it.

The word company, as used there, indicates close relationships. It indicates a closeness, or if you like, a unity, so that within the word, the congregation, which is a wider sense of meaning, but nevertheless within the congregation, and the need for the whole congregation.

He's not talking here in the word company. He's not talking about a section of the congregation. He's not talking about a certain part of the congregation. What he's doing is describing the whole congregation, the whole church he belongs to, as a company, as a body of people who are united together closely, who are bonded together, and who love being bonded together spiritually and practically in the things of God.

And so he's using that word company just to remind us that here is something very important. We worship individually, but we also take our individual persons and worship into the company. We join together and are bonded together with others of the same mind. And we don't look at that as something other than just a spiritual family.

[10:17] And then he uses the word congregation. And the congregation takes us really into just an emphasis on the wholeness of the people of God together.

The company shows the closeness. The congregation means the wholeness of it, just the whole extent of the people of God. And so that's how it is for ourselves.

And you see, when you actually look at it in this way, then it helps us to avoid the cliquishness that sometimes creeps into the church. And again, I'm not suggesting that that's part of our own congregational life, though it's very easy to fall into that.

Cliquishness where you've got people of a certain disposition or mindset that will just keep to themselves and not really bother much with fellowship with the other lot. And likewise. So what he's doing here is telling us that the congregation, the whole expanse of God's people, as they give thanks and as each individual fits into that, so they're together as a company, as a bonded together fellowship of God's people.

These are the people who thank God. And that's how we want to be, not only tonight, but always. As we think about the importance of thanking God, that we do it, not just in the whole extent of the congregation, but especially in these very intimate bonds of Christian fellowship, we give thanks to God.

[11:49] And secondly, the God who is thanked by his people. As we said, the psalm takes us through the works of God and the character of God is also mentioned as the ground for which we give thanks.

And when you think about his works, first of all, the word works is repeated throughout the psalm. And you can see the different ways in which it's used there. Now, the works of God are, as we'll see, they're very often, they very often speak about the way God has revealed himself or continues to reveal himself to his people.

And you could say that the goodness of God, where God's goodness is experienced by any people, that goodness of God is not just something academic or something theological that you associate with God and you just think about it as belonging to him, but it doesn't really have an impact on your life.

Of course it does. The goodness of God is actually demonstrated in his works. And it's his works that actually touch upon our lives practically.

So that the very being of God, because remember the Bible says God is good. That characterizes him. How do you know that he's good?

[13:08] Because he does good to us. Because his works demonstrate that he is good. And that's why the two things are always connected, the goodness of God and our experience of that in his works, as his works actually demonstrate that.

Now, we can divide that into three brief categories, if you like. His works, first of all, in creation, and then his works in providence, and then his works in salvation.

And in the Bible, the three are closely connected. You can't detach God's work of creation from his works of providence or from his works in salvation.

And in creation, of course, verse 2 here, great are the works of the Lord studied by all who delight in them. The word works there is very often used of the creation of God or God as the creator.

Psalm 8, for example. Psalm 19, verse 1, the heavens declare the glory of God. The sky preaches his craftsmanship, his handiwork, his work of creation.

[14:18] And that work of creation is something that we admire, studied by all who delight in them. That's the great difference, isn't it, between yourselves as believing people and somebody who's simply dismissing the Bible and thinks atheistically.

You look up to the heavens, you admire it, you admire the expanse of the universe, but you don't admire the craftsmanship because you don't believe in the craftsmanship as an atheist. You just see it as happened.

It happened. But you look at it and as you look up and see the sun and the moon and the stars at night, you say, I see the evidence of God's fingers in that.

He laid it out. He created it. These are his works. And we give thanks for that. Just think of the wisdom that has arranged what you find even in the very creation for us.

Where would the earth be if it was at a different distance from the sun to what it is? If it was nearer, it would be too hot. If it was further away, it would be too cold.

[15:23] It wouldn't sustain life either way. It's no accident that the earth is where it is and that it's this planet that actually contains human life, the lives that God actually works among so that he brings people through his works of providence and salvation to know himself as their creator and as their savior.

And so this is what the psalmist is saying elsewhere, that he studies the works of God, the work of God in framing the universe. And he didn't just throw them out there and leave them to find a place for themselves.

He has placed them where he wanted them to be placed. Whatever forces he had built into the nature, into nature, into the universe in terms of the whole expanse of the heavens and all the solar systems, all the other systems that you find and we're told exist, the galaxies, billions of other forms, of galaxies and planets and stars, they're not there by accident.

They didn't come to create themselves. They didn't end up where they are by accident. They were placed there by God.

You know, they were placed there particularly, not just for his own glory, of course, primarily, but everything that is in the creation of God is especially designed for the benefit of his people.

[17:02] Isn't that an amazing thing that tonight as you observe the wonders of the universe, the wonders of creation, they are there for his people's benefit. It is his people especially that he had in mind as he created them.

When he created the earth and all that he put in the earth before man was created, he created all of that to be man's environment.

He created that specially for the human beings that he was going to place there. It was that view to their benefit. We give thanks to God tonight that his creation provides us with so much that is beneficial.

You can build into that all the various details of the food that you eat, of the conditions that you live in from season to season that provides us with the food and the resources that the earth provides. But the seasons are important. The environment is important. All of that comes from the provision of God. So we thank the God who is thanked by his people for his works of creation but also for his works of providence.

[18:14] See in verses 3 onwards he says full of splendor and majesty is his work and his righteousness endures forever. He has caused his wondrous works to be remembered.

The Lord is gracious and merciful. He provides food for those who fear him. He remembers his covenant forever. The works of his providence. Remember from the catechism, shorter catechism, most of us learned it I'm sure is still hugely important to learn it as a summary of Bible teaching. What are God's works of providence? God's works of providence are his most holy, wise, and powerful, preserving, and governing all his creatures and all their actions.

His most holy, wise, and powerful, preserving, and governing all his creatures and all their actions. Well the Bible specially mentions his actions toward his people.

nevertheless, it is through God's providential upholding of the creation that things exist and continue to exist. If you think of having the whole world in his hand, what would happen if God dropped his hand?

[19:28] It would collapse. Everything would fall to pieces. it's the most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures and all their actions.

We give thanks tonight for God's works of providence and that within these works of providence he makes such wonderful provision for us even in terms of our bodily needs, in terms of our mental needs, in terms of all that we require to live, even taking account of that more physical or mental part of our being.

And it's really all within the purpose of God there and indeed that's why you find the words of Psalm 112 verses 3 to 5 you notice he uses the same words there as he's used of God in Psalm 111 because there this is about the life of the godly wealth and riches are in his house and so on.

Then he goes into verse 4 light dawns in the darkness for the upright he's gracious he's merciful he's righteous these three words especially gracious, merciful, righteous they're describing God in

Psalm 111 now they're describing the godly in Psalm 112 and it reminds us of the tie between God's works of providence and our own benefit from them and so we replicate if you like in the way that we seek to live to his glory these things that are mentioned there the works of righteousness merciful and righteous and graciousness how we deal with other people is a reflection of how God deals with us we give thanks for how he does so so there's a close tie between what God is like and what he expects from ourselves the God who is thanked for his works works of creation his works in providence and then also his works in salvation the word that you find there in verse 4 has caused his wondrous works to be remembered literally in Hebrew the word is wonder he has caused his wonders to be remembered that reminds you of the great acts of God described in the Old Testament itself these wonderful acts especially the Old Testament constantly in the way in which God was thought about went back to the Exodus and to Sinai especially and by the time the psalmist came to write many of these psalms these were the things that the people remembered in different ways and God had given them such ways to remember them as such as the Passover and these great events were kept in the mind of the people and that's why here he's saying he has caused his wonders to be remembered what are the wonders the wonders are the theophanies the great displays of God in revealing himself as he revealed himself to the people coming out of Egypt and the wonders of the Exodus and coming through the Red Sea and the wonders at Sinai when the mountain thundered as God came down and they saw the fire on the top of the mountain indicating the presence of this holy and living

[22 : 47] God the wonders of God you take that with you of course into even greater wonders than these the wonder of the incarnation the wonder of Christ coming into the world the son of God coming to be human coming to be born of a woman the wonder of the cross the wonder of his life the wonder of his death the wonder of his resurrection the wonder of his exaltation the wonder of the prospect of his return the wonder of his person God and man together so many wonders that he causes us to remember and gives us as we will on the Lord's day God willing gives us to remember by means of the sacrament of the Lord's supper his works in salvation and all of God's saving acts reveal something of his glory reveal something that is of his wondrous works for us to actually give thanks for in verse 9 very interesting what he says there in terms of redemption or salvation we're really rushing through it fairly quickly but you can see here he sent redemption to his people he has commanded his covenant forever you know when you go through the Psalms just like in most of the book of

Proverbs you have in many of the verses a really wonderful balance first part of the verse balances beautifully with the second part of the verse when you look at verse 9 there you can see it's about redemption it's about his covenant and so on to do with salvation but he has the word sent balanced by the word commanded he sent redemption to his people he has commanded his covenant forever he didn't just send something to his people without actually giving some structure to how they were to keep it and how they were to observe it he actually has commanded his covenant forever and an interesting feature that you can follow for yourselves is how God commands blessing for his people Psalm 133 that little psalm that we often sing in terms of expressing our thankfulness for the unity that

God gives to his people and how as it ends there this unity these dwelling together in unity it's like the precious oil it's also like the dew of Hermon which falls on the mountains of Zion for there the Lord has commanded the blessing even life forevermore it's almost a picture really of blessing as if it was an entity in itself as if it was a living thing in itself and here's God coming to command and saying this is where I command you to go to such and such a person to such and such a people and that's a feature of the Bible's thinking especially in the Old Testament remember for example Elijah twice within a very short space of time you find Elijah mentioned as coming to be provided for by God he was told by God go leave where you are go to the brook cherries for there I have commanded the ravens to feed you before Elijah reached the brook cherries God's command had reached there ahead of him the provision of God that he had commanded was waiting for him there same thing when he had to leave there and go to the widow of Zarephath God said go for I have commanded a widow woman there to look after you see wherever you go as a Christian God has his command ahead of you God has prepared the way for you what a wonderful comfort that is what a wonderful reason to give thanks to God you're not leaving here tonight wondering is God going to go ahead of me as a Christian through my life is God going to forget about me tomorrow even if he's remembered me today is God going to provide for me tomorrow

and in the rest of my life as he has heretofore up to now of course he is because he commands the blessing he sent redemption he has commanded his covenant forever and where God commands it gets done where God speaks authoritatively no power can resist that can overcome that can undo that so here is the God who is thanked by his people tonight we thank him for his works for his works of creation for his constancy in providing for us from that we thank him for his works in providence his upholding of us his continuing of to provide us with the ways in which we live from day to day and we give thanks to him especially for his works in salvation because without that the other two would benefit us a lot but only a little compared to salvation because you cannot possibly compare everything that you get in the world for your physical good to what you get in

[28 : 18] Christ for your spiritual we give thanks to him for that but also for his character the God who is thanked by his people is thanked not only for his works but also for his character more briefly and in his character he reveals especially his faithfulness you see there in verse 7 through to verse 8 the works of his hands are faithful and just all his precepts are trustworthy they are established forever and ever to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness it's not just mere power on the part of God it doesn't just exercise power when he provides for you when he saves you when he continues to sanctify you in your life no he deals with you in faithfulness he's faithful to his promises he's faithful to what he has already guaranteed in Christ he will not depart from that and although we are at times very often at times we are fearful of what the future might hold or even what's going to happen to us in the present that's understandable and it happens to most if not all of us but he is reminding us that we thank God for his character for his constancy for his wonderful consistency and for the way that his faithfulness is a guarantee that he will do what he has promised for his people in other words there's a very close connection and a harmony between what God does and what

God is like his character is not different to what you see in his works he doesn't do things out of keeping with his character he's not going to be tomorrow something other than what he is in himself towards us and as long with along with his faithfulness finally there's in his character there is his remembering you can see there in verse four back in verse four in fact that he mentions that he causes he has caused his wondrous works to be remembered and the idea of the word there is probably goes back to the Passover the idea of the word there is the idea of a memorial something that's set up to be a memorial of something important that's happened that you want to keep in mind the Passover in the Old Testament is very much to do with that to remember that they were slaves in Egypt to remember that God released them that God delivered them that they knew redemption in terms of that of course the

New Testament as we said the memorial of the Lord's Supper where it's the case that we remember the Lord Jesus Christ as well as God remembering us and these things are truly wonderfully in harmony as well the way that God's remembering of his covenant of his people fits alongside God's people remembering his covenant and remembering him in his faithfulness as well so tonight let's finish by just saying something in terms of a summary comment we have much to be thankful for we don't need more to make us thankful but we do need to be more thankful we don't need more to make us thankful we should be thankful already with what we have and whatever God gives but we do need to increase our thankfulness to be more thankful because that is how we honour the God who looks after his people and who looks after them consistently let's pray Lord our gracious God we cannot possibly number or comprehend even as the psalmist said elsewhere the many gifts that you bestow upon us if we were to number them Lord they exceed our ability to number them but you know how much we give you thanks even as we do understand something of what you give to us and so Lord we give thanks that we have been here this evening for this purpose we do pray that you would bless what we have come to understand from your word this evening and may it add to our thankfulness that we understand these matters increasingly as our life goes on continue with us now we pray Amen

Amen Let's conclude now our worship. This evening we're singing in Psalm 117. Psalm 117, page 155.

[33 : 57] Two verses, so we'll sing them twice. We'll just sing them twice through. Well, there are two verses in terms of six lines.

Praise the Lord, O all you nations, all you peoples sing his praise. For his love is great towards us, his commitment lasts always. He is faithful now and ever.

Hallelujah. Praise the Lord. Singing it through twice, Psalm 117. Praise the Lord, O all you nations,
All you people sing his praise.

For his love is great towards us, his commitment lasts always.

He is faithful now and ever. He is faithful now and ever. Hallelujah. Praise the Lord.

[35 : 14] Hallelujah. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. All you
nations, All you people sing his praise.

For his love is great towards us, His commitment lasts always.

He is faithful now and ever. Hallelujah. Praise the Lord.

Hallelujah. Praise the Lord. Hallelujah. Praise the Lord. I'll go.