

A Sacrifice of Thanksgiving

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn for a short time to Psalm number 50 in the book of Psalms, Psalm 50, and we'll read at verse 14. Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and perform your vows to the Most High, and call upon me in the day of trouble.

I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me. Well, what a fabulous opening you have to the Psalm. What an amazing burst you have at the beginning of the Psalm as God simply jumps into the scene.

And not just God in any description, but God with these names that are given to the Mighty One, the God, the Lord. He speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting.

You have this amazing opening that really grabs your attention as you come to read the Psalm, because you're confronted not only with God and a picture of him in his grandeur and his greatness with the names that are given to him, but also you have God calling the whole earth to actually face him in judgment.

And that's carried through into the psalm. He's summoning the whole earth, because it's really then set in terms of God himself being the judge and setting before him the people that he mentions here, in order that they come to answer his demands.

[1 : 3 2] And as you reach verse 4, the focus then begins to narrow, because it begins by a call to the whole earth from God, but then it begins to narrow, and it becomes obvious that he's speaking specifically, as he says in verse 7, to his people Israel.

Hear, O Israel, hear all my people, and I will speak. O Israel, I will testify against you. I am your God. I am God, your God.

And as you go through the psalm, you realize that he's actually addressing them because they really have, most of them, nothing more than a formality of religion. And he's calling upon them to actually deal with this, and to actually come and give him the sacrifice of praise, enter into spiritual worship, the kind that he requires and demands of them.

Now, this is a method that's used elsewhere in the Bible, where God begins by a wider focus, and then draws his own covenant people, Israel or Judah, into the picture.

You find the same thing in Amos, the opening chapters of the prophecy of Amos there, where God, using Amos, speaks of different peoples, different lands, Adam, Moab, and so on.

[2 : 5 3] And then he comes to Israel and Judah. You can just imagine or picture those who are listening to Amos there setting out these great terms of God calling all of these peoples to judgment.

You can imagine Israel and Judah saying, yes, that's Adam, yes, that's definitely the Moabites. The description there is absolutely right. But then God is saying, but it's to you that I'm actually addressing myself particularly.

And in a way, that's what you find Jesus doing with Peter. Because Jesus, as Peter had so grievously denied the Lord, then you find in John 21, an account of his restoration there.

And as Peter turns and asks the Lord, what shall this one do? Talking about his fellow disciple. And what he's saying, of course, what he replies to is, well, what is that to you?

You follow me. You have the same when he questioned the disciples earlier about his own identity or revealed to them more of his identity. Remember, he began by saying, who do the people say that I am?

[4 : 05] What is it you're hearing about me in the communities around? What are people saying about me? Who are they making me to be? And the disciples answered, well, some are saying, Elijah, some are saying you're one of the prophets.

But then he turned it and said, yeah, but who do you say that I am? See, that was his method, just as the method of the psalmist and of Amos, where the net is widened, first of all, at the beginning.

And they're caught in there with the attention given to what God is saying of these various peoples. But then it comes back to this particular narrow focus. Yes, but what about you? That's really what he's doing in this psalm as well.

He's addressing the mere formality of their religion, of their worship. And he's really, in many ways, as you go through the psalm, as we've read it through, you can see the element of hypocrisy on their part as well.

They are a covenant people. They know the Lord from the past, the Lord's dealings with them as a people. But it's just a formality now that they're involved with in their religion. It's just something outward.

[5 : 08] And there's a call here by God for genuine worship and genuine commitment to him as his covenant people. And in that, in these verses 14 and 15, we're looking at something there tonight, which is applicable to this day being for us a day of prayer, but also a day of thanksgiving, where the two elements combine.

Because that's really what you've got. You've got praise in verse 14, offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving. You could translate that praise as well. And where he then says, and perform your vows to the Most High.

And then secondly, in verse 15, and call upon me in the day of trouble. I will deliver you and you shall glorify me. So you've got praise and prayer. But as we'll see, they're not just put side by side as if there's nothing much to connect them.

There's a very close and important connection between what he's saying about prayer and the promise to those who pray in connection with the offering of the sacrifice of thanksgiving.

Let's just look at them briefly. Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving. Now, the language there itself is very interesting. It's using the language of sacrifice.

[6 : 21] But it's really in respect of worship that he's applying it. And you find that elsewhere in the Bible as well. Hosea chapter 14, where the prophet is again is calling or the Lord calling to the people to come back to himself.

Very similar kind of situation. Take with you words, he's saying. And we will offer the calves of our lips or the bullocks of our lips. What he's talking about, come back in repentance and show that you've repented by a proper spiritual praise of God.

And of course, when you go to Hebrews, you find the language there in Hebrews, probably going back to that reference in that reference in that we've mentioned there in Hosea.

Hebrews chapter 13, where you're called there at verses 15 and 16, where the writer is contrasting the spiritual sacrifice they have in Christ with those that were offered in the temple.

And where he's saying there, we have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. And he goes on to speak about the animals. Then outside the camp, Jesus also suffered outside the camp.

[7 : 32] Therefore, let us go out to him outside the camp, bearing the approach he endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. Through him, let us therefore offer up a sacrifice of praise to God that is the fruit of our lips.

Now, that's interesting that he's using the word sacrifice or offering for our giving of praise to God, because that's essentially what it is. That's what we're doing in Thanksgiving.

That's what we're doing in not just singing praise to God, but speaking out praise to God. It's really a spiritual, verbal sacrifice. It's an offering to God.

And that's very important for us, even on the level of realizing that what we're involved in when we're singing God's praises, and when we're speaking of God in a praiseworthy way, then what we're actually engaged in is an actual living offering to God, just as surely as they came with the animals in the Old Testament and made these their offerings to God.

So we're coming with our praise as an offering to God. There is that element in it where we are bringing this to God for his acceptance. It's not just a ritual.

[8 : 49] It's not something merely formal, though there's a formality to it. And that's what he's actually calling Israel here, too. Offer to God a sacrifice of praise.

And the focus especially is on Thanksgiving, a sacrifice of Thanksgiving, because in the Old Testament, sacrifices were intended or meant to be expressions of their gratitude to God, expressions of their commitment to God.

It wasn't just that God required this of them as part of their worship. They were meant to bring this in a spirit of devotion. That's why God is accusing them here of lacking such.

And here, as the language is used to express a spiritual sacrifice of Thanksgiving as an offering to God, well, it follows into our own offering of praise to God as well.

You can see Psalm 66, for example, a similar type of emphasis there. Psalm 66 and at verses 13 to 15, where the psalmist is there saying, I will come into your house with burnt offerings.

[9 : 56] I will perform my vows to you, that which my lips uttered and my mouth promised when I was in trouble. I will offer to you the burnt offerings of fattened animals with the smoke of the sacrifice of rams.

I will make an offering of bulls and goats. Now that comes after the context there immediately before that, where he's saying to God, Lord, you have tested us. You have tried us as silver has tried.

You brought us into the net. You laid a crushing burden on our backs. You let men ride over our heads. We went through fire and through water. Yet you have brought us out to a place of abundance.

And that's what really you're looking forward to in the crisis points of life. God doesn't promise that they will actually suddenly be taken away. That may very well be the case. But as we'll see later, what you're really praying for and what you pray for tonight is that God will use such things, not only in our own experience, but in the experience of our people.

For example, at this critical time with this pandemic that's gone on for so long. There is the Lord testing us. That's really what's happening. People may not realize it.

[11 : 04] The world out there may not realize it. They may totally reject the idea that there's anything of God in it. But you and I know, as those who know the Bible and know the teaching of the Bible and know the principles of God's providence, that God is testing us, that God is testing us, as the psalmist in Psalm 66 is saying there, laying a crushing burden on our backs, taking us through fire and water.

And you're praying that the outcome will be as it was for them, as he says, you have brought us out to a place of abundance, an open place, freedom, liberty, blessing.

That's why he's coming and saying, I will come into your house with burnt offerings. And he's calling then in verse 16, come and hear all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for my soul.

So our thanksgiving, that element of our worship, that is thanksgiving. In many ways, that's really what proves the genuineness of our worship. We can't use words, but of course, God is talking here of the things of the heart, the things of the soul.

We can all use words, just like Israel here, we're using words, and all that that is, is just religion. It's an external formality, just like the Pharisees were in Jesus' day.

[12 : 26] And here, God is calling them to that different spiritual approach to him and to his worship, where they genuinely offer sacrifice of thanksgiving.

And the thanksgiving really shows, as we come with thanksgiving, that we're serious about our worship, that we're serious about God, that we acknowledge who he is and what he's done for us, what he continues to do for us, what he holds out and promise for us.

We come with our thanksgiving in relation to God's goodness. And it proves that we are indeed sincere and genuine in the worship we offer to him. You find the same note, of course, in regard to prayer itself.

In Philippians, which we've been going through for some time now on the Lord's Day evenings, and in chapter 4, as you remember, a verse we quote very often, Philippians 4, verse 6, don't be anxious about anything.

And he means don't be over-anxious, worried, filled with anxiety of that kind, but with prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving.

[13 : 31] Let your requests be made known to God. It doesn't just say, come to God with prayer and with supplication. Come to him, ask him, appeal to him, beseech him.

There's all that to it, but it's with thanksgiving. We're not just coming to say to the Lord, Lord, fill my life. In fact, the more we go on in life as Christians, the more we realize that when we come to pray to God, even at times of extremity, when our mind may be very much on seeking God's help and needing God's help, we should still think that the first thing we want to do to God is give thanks.

To thank God for the many ways in which his blessing continues. Even before we ask for his help, even in our extremities. With thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

And we're coming tonight to acknowledge that God is the source of all our blessings. That every gift and every good and perfect gift, as James says, comes down from above.

None of us has created for ourselves any good and perfect gift that's of value to ourselves or help to others. They're all from God. They're God from God's enabling.

[14 : 52] Whatever our position is in life, whatever way we seek to serve the Lord, we are absolutely dependent upon him. We know our own need.

God shows us our need. And that need is supplied by the grace of God and dependence upon him. That's what he's calling on Israel, first of all, here.

And that's what fits in with our position tonight, that we're here to offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving. You've come with your offering.

And you've come with your offering in the name of Christ and on the basis of who he is and that he is your mediator and that you're coming to God through him. And you're saying to God, Lord, I have so much to give thanks for.

I'm like the psalmist in Psalm 40. If I were to number all the gifts that you give to me, they would exceed my ability to number them. But I thank you for them. I express my indebtedness to you for all that you continue to do for me.

[15 : 55] And it's appropriate, as the psalmist says elsewhere, to give thanks to God at all times. Psalm 34, a psalm that itself contains elements referring to suffering and trial and difficulty.

But that's how the psalmist begins. I will bless the Lord at all times. In all my circumstances, I want to give praise and thanks to him, is what he's saying.

But you see also he's saying here about paying the vows. Perform your vows to the Most High. Of course, that's a topic in itself in scripture, but I think here he's really referring to the promise that we make as covenant people to be obedient to God, to follow the Lord's ways.

That's where Israel are going astray. He's calling them back to that. And what he's saying is, offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving. And if you do that, what you'll be doing is fulfilling your vows of obedience.

Fulfilling your vows that you made to him, that you would be his people. That you would indeed be known as his people in the world. Psalm 116, you recall that great passage in Psalm 116, verse 12.

[17 : 10] What shall I render to the Lord for all his gifts to me? And he answers that, I will take or I will lift up the cup of salvation and I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people.

I will take the cup of salvation. The Bible, the Old Testament especially, speaks of cups, cup of wrath. God's wrath, as it were, poured into a cup from which he pours out his wrath upon those that are destined to receive it.

Of course, Jesus himself referred to that when he came out of Gethsemane and referred to the cup as he had been wrestling with God the Father in Gethsemane about this cup that he had given him, this cup of wrath, this cup of his agony.

And here is in the psalmist as well, Psalm 116, I will take the cup of salvation. Where God, as it were, has poured his salvation into a cup that he offers to his people.

And he is saying to them, now take this, this is yours. And this is the psalmist's response when he speaks of the goodness of God to him. How am I going to respond to it? And God responds, he is saying, by consistently and daily and regularly taking the cup of salvation to myself.

[18 : 30] Drinking in his salvation. Making my own what he has offered to me and offers to me in Jesus Christ. What a great privilege that is.

That you know such a thing. That you're able to do such a thing. You're thanking God tonight for the cup of salvation. For the redemption that you have in Jesus Christ.

For the way that he's placed that cup before you in the gospel. And for those of you who have come to confess him openly, which is most of you. This is really what it's about. You have taken that cup. You have held it up, as it were.

You have lifted it in the presence of the world and his people. And you've said, this is my God. This is why he's worthy of my thanks. This is why I worship him.

This is why I continue to trust in him. Perform your vows, he's saying. And perform your vows to the most high.

[19 : 27] And that's really our reaction or response tonight to the goodness, to the grace of God, isn't it? Not just coming outwardly to give him thanks with our lips, but with our hearts, offering to him the sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise.

And at the same time, accompanying that with the promise that this is what we will be, that we will always be a people as far as God enables us. Who will take the cup of salvation.

Who will actually pay, perform our vows. Who will show before the world that our obedience is to Christ the King. And that we bring him praise.

Thomas Watson, in his wonderful little book, The Godly Man's Picture, says the following.

A child of God keeps two books always beside him. One to write his sins in, that he may be humble. And the other to write God's mercies in, so that he may be thankful.

[20 : 30] And these are the two books that every Christian possesses. One to write your sins in, so that repenting of them, confessing them, you may be humble and realize your need of forgiveness and grace.

The other one, a book in which you number God's mercies to you, so that you may be thankful and express your thankfulness to him. So that's the first thing then, he here calls us to praise him.

And to praise him with thanksgiving, accompanying that with our obedience in living as those who have taken his salvation. And consistently bring that into our possession.

So that second thing then is prayer. Call upon me and call upon me in the day of trouble. I will deliver you and you shall glorify me. I mentioned a connection there at the beginning briefly.

It's not just putting these side by side. Praise and then prayer as if there isn't much of a connection between them. What he's really saying is the promise of verse 15, where he says, call upon me and I will deliver you and you shall glorify me.

[21 : 38] There's the promise. But that's a promise to the thankful. The unthankful. The unthankful heart. The unthankful person has no grounds whatsoever, no right whatsoever to expect God's blessing.

To expect that God will help him in the day of trouble. Because he's addressing this to the thankful. Now, none of us, of course, is thankful to the extent that we ought to be.

None of us is able to say, well, because, Lord, I am 100% thankful all the time, I have a right to expect then that you will look after me in the day of trouble. Thankfully, God is merciful.

He realizes our imperfection. And nevertheless, we come to thank him. And as we come with our thankfulness and bring our thankfulness to him and bring that as an offering that we owe to God, then we are assured, we are comforted in the fact that when we call upon him in the day of trouble, he will deliver us and we shall glorify him by his grace.

And the day of trouble, really, you could say, is not any specific day as such or any specific trouble as such.

[22 : 50] It's really just the day of trouble whenever trouble comes upon us. Any kind of trouble, afflictions of different kinds, sufferings, testings, all of those things in the trials of the believer's life.

And God is saying, thankfulness is something that I hear from you. I accept your thankfulness. And therefore, I promise that when you call upon me in the day of trouble, I will actually deliver you.

I will hear you. I will come to your rescue. But what does he mean by I will deliver you? Well, there's more than one kind of deliverance. Because it doesn't mean that God will deliver us when we call to him by just removing the thing that's troubling us.

That actually may be something that's there all our life long. Because, for example, Paul and the thorn in the flesh that he spoke of to God in 2 Corinthians 12, where he appealed to God three times to take this thorn away.

Whatever it was, it was certainly exceedingly painful. And what was God's response? Well, God said, my grace is sufficient for you.

[24 : 07] For my strength is made perfect in weakness. What he was saying to Paul really effectively was, I hear you, Paul, but I'm not going to take that thorn away.

What I am going to do is do something better than take the thorn away. I'm going to give you sufficient grace. Grace that answers your need. Grace that enables you not just to cope with it, not just to suffer it and to put up with it, but more than that, to benefit from it.

That's the deliverance. The apostle himself needed to be delivered from the kind of thinking that thought it best that the thorn be removed. But he came round by God's teaching to actually hear that this is not actually the best way always, that God may take away the cause of the suffering.

The best, as far as God is concerned, is to feed us with grace, channel grace into our lives. So that we can say then, as Paul said then, much more will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

For when I am weak, then I am strong. When God promises deliverance, don't think that it's going to be deliverance from the actual cause of the sufferings.

[25 : 27] But certainly, he always promises deliverance when we call to him and seek his grace. He always promises deliverance of the kind that he gave to Paul. A deliverance that feeds grace into our lives so as to actually benefit from the trials, the pains, the difficulties, the testings.

And he says, you shall glorify me. Very similar at the end of the psalm. The one who offers thanksgiving as a sacrifice glorifies me.

And he's really rounding it off by saying that the life that honors God, that gives praise to God, the life that glorifies God, that sets his name forth with honor and with praise, is this life, the thankful life, the life that relies upon him, the life that calls upon him in the day of trouble, the life that is seen to be a life that praises God, brings an offering of praise to him.

Again, it's Thomas Watson, that little book, I've taken a second, a quotation is full of these wonderful little quotations. He says, it is one thing to love our mercies.

It's another thing to love the Lord. Many love their deliverance, but not their deliverer. God is to be loved more than his mercies.

[27 : 00] Wonderful the way he captures the essence of things, as he put in these quotes we've mentioned. And I can finish also a quote from John Calvin, quoting in his commentary on this very psalm, where he speaks here about offering thanksgiving as a sacrifice.

The one who does this glorifies me. Of course, Calvin, through the psalm, as we said at the beginning, deals with the fact that Israel were being addressed as a people, were just formalizing their religion and weren't really in it with their hearts.

So this is how Calvin, what he says, in relation to verse 23. Every other form of worship is worthless, unless with sincere and grateful hearts we yield to God his glory.

Every other form of worship is worthless, unless with sincere and grateful, thankful hearts we yield to God his glory.

The glory that is due to him. So thanksgiving and prayer. They're together in this day that we're marking today as a day of thanksgiving and as a day of prayer.

[28 : 18] They're together in these two verses. The verse of thanksgiving in verse 14. The verse of prayer in verse 15. And the way that they're so wonderfully connected together.

And they're together in your heart, if I'm not mistaken. Thanksgiving and prayer together. As you offer to God your thanksgiving.

The sacrifice of thanksgiving. And as you at the same time come to pray to him. And depend upon him for his grace. May he bless these words and thoughts to us this evening.

We're going to conclude our service singing in...