

Thanksgiving and Thanksliving

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[0 : 00] Let's turn for a short time this evening to the book of Psalms, Psalm number 50. And we'll focus especially on the last verse of the psalm, Psalm 50 and verse 23.

The one who offers thanksgiving as a sacrifice glorifies me. To one who orders his way rightly, I will show the salvation of the Lord.

This, of course, is the Lord speaking. And as we've read through the psalm, you'll have noticed, of course, that the psalm begins with what we call a theophany, a manifestation of God.

Although in this instance, it's a description of a theophany or using words that usually are found, like, for example, on Mount Sinai. And other times the Lord appeared as a theophany, a powerful demonstration using aspects of the creation itself very often.

And so you find here that this kind of thing is what's described there. God comes. He does not keep silence before him is a devouring fire around him as a mighty tempest.

[1 : 04] And then you expect perhaps that there'll be an indication of who that's against. And you expect that that would be against his enemies and against the enemies of Israel. That God is coming in judgment to deal with the enemies of Israel.

And then there's something of a surprise, I think, when you read through the psalm, certainly if we hadn't read it before, something of a surprise that it's actually a summons to his covenant people.

Because it's against his covenant people that God has come with what's effectively an indictment, a legal case against them.

And he's calling them to judgment. He's calling them to meet with himself because he's obviously found things in their practice, in their way of life, in their outlook.

That is contrary to his will, contrary to what they know he has given them to follow. And as you find there in verse 7, hear, O my people, I will speak.

[2 : 06] O Israel, I will testify against you. I am God, your God. And, of course, by the time you reach that, you realize something serious is going on here. Because he's calling his covenant people.

His own people are named by him. He's calling them to be gathered, as it were, before him. He refers to them as those who have made a covenant with him by sacrifice.

But now he's actually saying, I will speak against you. I testify against you. I have a case against you. I have an indictment. That's something you find in the Old Testament, especially in the prophets.

You'll find it in Isaiah, Jeremiah, particularly in the book of Micah, which largely is an indictment against Israel. And it's the Lord describing the situation by way of a courtroom scene, by way of having his people gathered before him.

And he is the judge. He's sitting there presiding over the case. He himself reads the indictment against them. And then he calls them to answer. And as you go through the psalm, you realize why this is the case.

[3 :14] It's so because the Lord's covenant people have religion. But that's about it. He really has to testify against them for their mere formality.

They have all items in place. You can see there in verse 8, not for your sacrifices. Do I rebuke you? Your burnt offerings are continually before me. Similar to Isaiah chapter 1 into chapter 2.

The Lord is recounting for them how much they are religious, how much religion they do have. They have all the elements there of formality in worship.

But yet he then goes on and specifies what he's found wrong in them. He says in verse 16, to the wicked, God says, and I think he's talking here about those specifically within the covenant community of Israel.

Well, because that's really what the psalm is elsewhere. What right have you to recite my statutes or take my covenant on your lips? For you hate discipline. And you cast my words behind you.

[4 :23] If you see a thief, you are pleased with him. And you keep company with adulterers. You give your mouth free reign for evil. And your tongue frames deceit. You sit and speak against your brother.

You slander your own mother's son. These things you have done. And I have been silent, God is saying. But now matters are coming to a head. He's coming to rebuke them.

And lay this charge, he says in verse 21, before you. And as so often is the case, God brings to us this account from these times, as indeed you'll find in the New Testament, where he speaks in this way to his covenant people, just to remind us that we need to be more than just outwardly a covenant people.

To remind us that we do have great privileges in being a covenant people, but then we have to demonstrate what that means in practice. That is more than just having things in place formally.

It's actually living the kind of life that God is himself saying is pleasing to him. And so as we come to verse 23, where he really summarizes this against Israel, he's assuring them to the one.

[5 :38] The one who offers thanksgiving as a sacrifice glorifies me. That's what's absent, you see, because they're not living in thankfulness to God. But he's saying this one, if you come and if this is the case with you, then he glorifies me.

And the one who orders his way rightly, I will show the salvation of God. So God is focusing on spiritual thanksgiving and a life that glorifies him.

And if we want something to carry forward into this new year, it might be a bit strange that we're going to this sort of psalm to find something positive, something meaningful, something reassuring indeed.

But that's what it is. But it's against the background of what Israel were with their formality and indeed hypocrisy. I'm not suggesting at all that that's how it is with yourselves or with ourselves.

But then we all need to come to these passages of the Bible and realize how terribly easy it is for us to fall into the way of mere formalism. How easy it is for us just to be like others in the world, others who confess to be Christians.

[6 :51] And really, as far as we can see, all that they're doing is going through the motions. They have a certain ritual about them. And yet there doesn't seem to be, as far as an outward way of life, there doesn't really seem to be a Christian at Christ honoring life there.

That's what we ourselves must strenuously avoid. And we are brought back here to the crux of the matter of what we can call thanksgiving and thanksgiving.

Because the two things go together. Thanksgiving and thanksgiving. Because thanksgiving is not just using our lips and praise to God as we've been doing tonight.

It is that, of course. But thanksgiving is also something that should be reflected in how we live to God's glory or seek to live to God's glory day by day.

Let's look at these two issues. It divides itself, really, into these two matters. Thanksgiving and then ordering his way rightly or thanksgiving, as we've called it.

[7 : 56] Look at these in turn. He says, the one who offers thanksgiving as a sacrifice glorifies me. And it's significant to use the word offers there.

Because our worship of God is indeed our offering to him. And whenever you find the word offer used in this way regarding our worship of God, the word offer reminds us that when we worship God, we're doing more than just going through the motions, more than what Israel were doing then.

Because when you come with your worship to God, when you come with your praise of God, your prayers to God, you're listening, you're preaching, whatever aspects of the worship you think of, or even if it's just on our own with God, between ourselves and God, it is in fact a willing, knowledgeable, intellectual, heart-moving engagement that we are involved with.

When you offer something, you're obviously consciously doing something in bringing whatever it is you're offering. If it's in the ordinary sense of an offering, a gift or whatever it is, you're consciously doing that.

You don't just do that unthinkingly. You don't do that without really thinking deeply about what it means to you, what it means if the person accepts it or refuses it.

[9 : 24] All of those issues come into your offering of what it is you're offering. Even if it's when you're offering to take someone's place to do something for them, when you're offering to give off your services to the congregation, to the church, you're doing that consciously.

You're doing that thinking about what it's going to mean. You've thought it through. And that's what God is saying to Israel here, to the one who offers thanksgiving.

Now, I know our life is busy, and I'm speaking to myself as much as to anyone else here, but it's something we should be very much aware of as we prepare to come to worship the Lord.

Even if it's just for a few moments or whatever long we have, we have to think about it as our offering to God. And because it's our offering to God, we have to think about what it is we're doing and how we're doing it, what it is we're giving to him, why it is we're doing it, what is our purpose.

This is our offering to God. We're really saying to God, please, Lord, receive this from me. I have consciously thought about it and your worthiness to receive it.

[10 : 36] I've thought of how much I owe you this. And all of that comes into our preparation, as well as the actual engagement itself of worship.

It's central to all true worship that we offer to God, our offering, our worship as an offering to him. And our praise and thanksgiving is very much a part of that.

Now, it begins, of course, with offering ourselves to him. It's pretty meaningless, really. And just again, a nominalism or a mere formality to actually just think of coming to offer to God something in which we ourselves are hardly engaged.

Remember Romans chapter 12, how it begins? I beseech you, brothers, by the mercies of God, that you present, that you offer, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, wholly acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

And he's taking us to the mind. He's taking us to the issue of thinking about what we're doing and why we're doing it and the privilege of doing it as against just going through the motions.

[11:48] And when it's an offering of ourselves, then it follows that praise and thanksgiving form part of that.

We come and offer ourselves to God. It's virtually impossible to do that. In fact, I think it is impossible to do that, to offer yourself consciously to God in his service, in the service of his church, whatever it is we're doing, without really being aware of the fact that you are praising God and giving him the thanks that is due to him for the privilege of this.

And for his worthiness. That you're giving him this in respect of that. In fact, that's interesting, isn't it? Hebrews chapter 13 uses the words to do with sacrifice and with offerings.

You recall there in Hebrews 13 that the writer is saying from verse 15 onwards that he's been speaking about Christ sanctifying himself for his people.

Therefore, let us go out to him, bearing his reproach. For here we have no lasting city. And he continues the language of sacrifice when he says through him, through him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God.

[13:05] That is the fruit of our lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

You see what he's saying? We're coming to God and we're offering up our sacrifice of praise to him. But he doesn't leave it at that. He's saying don't neglect to do good and share because that too is a sacrificial exercise.

It's the giving of yourself to God in humble service. A reminder to us that this really is how we should carry on through the year as we begin each year with reflection on the time that has passed.

Where our lives are going, what we've done, what we've done, what we've not done. And it's our privilege tonight to remind ourselves that the one who offers thanksgiving as a sacrifice glorifies God.

He glorifies me, says the Lord. And that element of thanksgiving there as an offering, as part of the offering, is something that we're reminded of too, of course, in the New Testament.

[14:11] Philippians 4, verse 6, don't be overanxious about anything, but with prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

And there's, I think, at least a suggestion there, if not a specific element of teaching there, that if our worship is actually devoid of thanksgiving, or if thanksgiving is at a minimum, then obviously it affects the rest of the sacrifice too.

It's a bit like the Old Testament sacrifices, all the elements to do with the sacrifice, as God had specifically ordered had to be in place in order to be pleasing to him. And here is God reminding us too, that if we're offering our praise to God, if we're coming with our supplication and prayer to God, how much that is part of what we need to do, it has to be accompanied with thanksgiving, with the incense, if you like, of the thanksgiving that ascends to God.

And that's why we tend, certainly we were taught in my time in college, taught to try and always begin the main prayer of a service of worship with thanksgiving to God.

Before you begin to go through to supplication or intercession or whatever, we begin with thanksgiving. And indeed, in our own private prayers as well, it is always good to try and keep to that pattern.

[15 : 45] Now, there'll be some times when you come before God and your mind is so taken up with something and you plead for God's help, and you perhaps don't have the element of thanksgiving to begin with that rightly or ideally should be there.

Well, God understands that. But nevertheless, we should try and always pattern our prayers so that we begin with thanksgiving to God.

Because, again, you see, that's part of thinking about what worship is and how we're going to worship and why. We're coming to God to worship him. So we begin to reflect on what have I got from God?

What reasons for thankfulness have I got? And, of course, there are many. So we come before him with our thanksgiving, our offering of thanksgiving, the sacrifice of thanksgiving as pleasing to God.

Now, that's reminding us of something important, that while it is true in worship that we come to receive from God, and that is itself a vital matter.

[16 : 49] We've come here tonight to receive from God, to receive his blessing, to receive his instruction, to receive his guidance. But it's not a primary element of worship, because the primary element of worship is coming to give to God, before we even think of receiving from him.

What a great privilege to receive from him, but we receive from him by firstly giving to him. We give to him what is his due. We give to him ourselves. We give to him our praise.

We give to him our thanksgiving. We say to God, please, Lord, when I go to worship, don't let me forget to begin by thanking you. And remind me how much I have to give thanks for.

That's such an important thing that we come to God thinking, you see, a lot of, I don't really like to generalize, but when you find a lot of the modern church, to say the more liberal side, certainly, you get the impression that it's pretty much about what pleases me, what pleases us as human beings.

The arrangement of however things are done, it has to be in a way that really gratifies my own heart, gratifies our own desires, fulfills ourselves and our need to actually enjoy ourselves.

[18 : 14] Now, please don't get me wrong. There is an enjoyment element to worship. We desire God. We love to meet with God. We love to have fellowship with God. It gives us joy to meet with God, to worship God.

But as we come to give to God firstly and primarily, it's a matter of what is pleasing to him first, then what's pleasing to ourselves.

And if it's pleasing to us first, the danger is we won't begin with what's pleasing to him, that we will arrange it, that we have things, first of all, that please us and it feels good.

And you get that feel good factor and you go by your feelings. And you begin to think, well, this is the essence of my worship. No, it's not. The essence of my worship is, as God sets out in his word, what is it that's pleasing to me?

How does God define worship for us? What are the main elements of worship and how are they set out in scripture? Not going to go into that just now, but you know what they are yourselves.

[19 : 22] The singing of his praises, calling upon him in prayer, reading his word, having his word expounded and listening to the word preached.

And in all of these, we begin first by asking ourselves, is this pleasing to God? Am I doing this the way he himself has set out for me?

And if that is the case, then don't be surprised if it's pleasing to you as well. But if it's not pleasing to God, there's no point in beginning by just thinking, well, it feels good to me.

Who offers thanksgiving as a sacrifice glorifies me. One of the commentators on the book of Psalms, William S. Plummer, says this, and I looked it up just earlier on for verse 23, and one of the comments he makes says this.

It doesn't arise directly necessarily out of the text, but this is what he says. He who would be truly holy must take God's word for his rule of living.

[20 : 30] It's what it would be me saying. You go by the pattern of God's word as to what's pleasing to him. That's what he said. He who would be truly holy must take God's word for his rule of living. God's son for his savior.

God's spirit for his guide, comforter, and sanctifier. God's people for his chosen companions. God's glory for the aim and object of his life.

And God's love as the great animating principle of his conduct. That's a mouthful. That's a challenge to live up to.

But that's really it, isn't it? That's basically what Asaph is saying to us at the end of this psalm. Take God's word for your rule of living. Take God's son for your savior.

Not just your idea of what a savior is or my idea or the world's idea or the church's idea. The Christ of scripture. We're going through 1 Corinthians 15 for our Sunday evening studies.

[21 : 34] And we've emphasized in that how important it is to realize, of course, what Paul is dealing with are facts. The facts of Christ's death.

The facts of Christ's burial. The fact of his resurrection. The fact of his appearing then following his resurrection. To demonstrate that it is no other than himself. That's not what the modern church wants to hear.

That's what the Bible says is the essence of our worship. What is according to God's own word. And then God's spirit as his guide.

God's people for his chosen companions. And God's glory for the aim and object of his life. And God's love as the great animating principle of his conduct.

So thanksgiving. And then secondly, thanksgiving. Because he goes on to one who orders his way rightly. I will show the salvation of God.

[22 : 37] Now if you check the commentators on this, your comments or books that refer to us, you'll find there are various opinions just exactly how we should take this part of the verse of the text.

But let's take it this way. I think this is the way that fits best with the psalm as a whole. The one who orders his way rightly is really a reference to life in addition to what you do in actual worship.

To order your life rightly is to have those principles that come into your worship actually control or govern the whole of your life.

He's really saying here, the one who gives thanksgiving as a sacrifice glorifies me. But as if he's going, it's really him going on to say, well, glorifying me also is the very crux of your life as a believer.

You order your life in a way that fits with glorifying God. And you have everything you need to know how to do that already in his word.

[23 : 39] You know, God has given us his word so that all of these issues are set before us clearly. In other words, if we really are sincere as you, I know you are about, as I hope we all are, about our acts of worship and our praise and our thanksgiving, then the pattern of our life along with that or outwith that, if you like, is going to match up with it.

That's not what is happening in Israel. They had all of these formal elements of worship in place, but their lifestyle was so very different to what it should have been.

It wasn't in accordance with God's own instructions. They hated discipline. They cast his words behind them. They were actually just not really taking issue at all with such things as thieving or adultery.

Framing deceit with their mouth. They weren't bothered about that. They just did it. Then they went to their sacrifices thinking that was going to be okay. But this is what he's saying.

Whoever orders his life rightly, I will show the salvation of God. In other words, those who would seek to live to the glory of God, to give him thanksgiving, to have a life of thanksgiving, to worship that really sets that as an offering of thanksgiving, a sacrifice to glorify God.

[25 : 09] Their ordering of life will be just as they are in approaching worship, so they are in approaching the rest of life. Thinking about it. Setting everything in its place as it should be.

Making choices as far as priorities are concerned. What comes first, Jesus or myself? What comes first, my discomforts living as a Christian or the comforts of just living by avoiding some of my responsibilities?

Choices. Choices that fit in with what's pleasing to God, what's glorifying to him. So we carefully mark out and we organize our choices.

That's an aspect of daily living. And it's something in which, again, we seek to have the guidance of God's word for that.

And the inner power of God's spirit working within us. Because we're not going to choose these things for ourselves, naturally. Not are we going to choose them for ourselves if we're backslidden.

[26 : 12] If we've stopped reading our Bibles regularly. If we've dropped off from prayer and seeking God's face and God's guidance. That's not ordering our way rightly.

But if we're ordering our way rightly, then you have this promise. I will show. This is God speaking, of course. I will show the salvation of God.

I think that means if we have our life ordered rightly. So that things are set in a way that would glorify God. That would put him first.

That would have our life structured and organized in such a way as that would be our priority. As we all want it to be. Then the promise is that if life is lived that way.

Then God will show us the salvation that is his. In other words, he's really saying he will conduct us into more experience and knowledge of that salvation.

[27 : 13] As life goes on. I will show the salvation of God to him. Indeed, the language used literally is interesting.

I will show really means he will really delight in. I will gaze with delight at this.

I will show the salvation of God. God himself takes delight in doing this. And we take delight in turn in receiving from him the guidance, the teaching, the benefits that he gives us through the gospel.

Worship and the life that is structured and set out to please God, to be, if you like, a delight to God. And that's what ends up being a delight to us too.

Because our greatest delight is not in that delight itself. Our greatest delight is in knowing that God is delighted. Our greatest pleasure is knowing that we are pleasing to God.

[28 : 21] And we know that we are pleasing to God. Even as we heard in prayer, although we confess, of course, very rightly our sins daily to God. And although we acknowledge before God, Lord, I am nothing like what I should be.

I should have learned more by now how to control my innermost desires and urges better than I do. I should have controlled my tongue better than I did in the last year. I should have done this and that much better than I did.

I should be a better Christian than I am. All of that is true of us and true of us all. And yet, it is still the case that we are pleasing to God when we come sincerely in the name of Christ to offer our worship to him.

We are given assurance in God's word that our sacrifices are pleasing to God. Our spiritual sacrifice of worship and praise, they are pleasing to God or made pleasing to him through Jesus Christ.

See, everything that we're doing this evening by way of worship, when we are in it sincerely and honestly and believably and wholeheartedly seeking to glorify God, all of that is actually set before God by the intercession or through the intercession of Christ.

[29 : 45] And because he is pleasing to him, everything we offer sincerely in his name, despite our sinfulness, is pleasing to him too.

And we have to believe that. We can't leave a place of worship like this simply saying, well, I am such a terrible sinner.

I don't understand just how anything I can give to God can be in any way pleasing to him. Well, it's understandable that's how we feel. But that's not how the word of God would have us to conclude.

We are pleasing to him and our offering is pleasing to him because of Jesus. If Jesus were ever to cease to be pleasing to God, we would then cease to have confidence that anything we offer will be pleasing to him.

But that's never going to happen. So don't beat yourself up by thinking you're such a poor sinner that there's hardly any point in you offering anything to God.

[30 : 49] He's hardly likely to accept it anyway. You may feel that. I may feel like that many times, but it's not true. Because of Jesus himself.

Because of who he is. Because of his perfect quality of life and his perfect death and his resurrection from the dead and his intercession above.

To the one who orders this way rightly, I will show the salvation of God. And it's interesting and significant that the New Testament really affirms and reaffirms these things many times and in different ways for us.

And especially that the guidance, the further revelation of God through his word of his salvation to us.

Our better understanding of our increase in knowledge. That's really how 2 Peter, isn't it, finishes. It's interesting there too that in such a devastating critique as 2 Peter sets out for those who are dismissing the return of the Lord and so on.

[32 : 03] But this is how he finishes. What's the alternative?

Grow in the grace and knowledge. Of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Grow in the grace and knowledge.

That's our great privilege. He roots us in him. Not to be static. Not to be content with what's been or where we are at. But grow in the knowledge.

It's the only successful way to counteract the workings of the world. Indeed, the workings of our own hearts. It's the only way in which to counteract the temptations that come to you just to slag it off a bit in the Christian life.

Or just to go the way of the nominal Christian and just let things become much more acceptable and easier than they are when you're seeking to please God.

[33 : 15] And always remember what Jesus said. Come to me, all you who labor and heavy laden, I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn of me. For I am meek and lowly in heart. And my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

And you will find rest to your souls. You know, it's a far, far greater burden, Jesus is saying, to try and please God by your own efforts.

Or to live by a way of legalistic relationship to God's word. The easier burden is just to take Jesus himself and say, you're everything I need.

I don't want to take anything from what you've done. And I don't need to. And I don't need to add to it. I'm looking for a perfect savior. That's what I have in you.

[34 : 21] I'm looking for a perfect righteousness I needed. That's what I have in you. I'm looking for a perfect ground of my hope for eternity. That's what I have in you.

You alone are all I need. And so you can say with the psalmist, whom do I have in the heavens but you? And on earth there is none I desire besides you.

My flesh and my heart fail. I quoted this at the funeral earlier on today. My flesh and my heart fail. But God is the strength of my heart.

And my portion forever. You know, isn't it an amazing thing that the likes of me and you can actually say this about God?

That he is our portion. He is our inheritance. He is everything to us. But he is.

[35 : 25] And that's where we rest. Our weedy hearts. In his sufficiency. And as Paul himself combined together these two great issues of peace.

Along with thanksgiving. So it is for us as well. You remember we quoted one of them already. Let's finish with these two verses. In Philippians chapter 4.

Where he talks there about prayer and supplication. With thanksgiving. Let your request be made known to God. And the peace of God. Which passes all understanding.

Will garrison your hearts and minds. Through Christ Jesus. And the following epistle. Colossians 3:15. He said very similarly. Let the peace of Christ.

Rule in your hearts. To which indeed you are called. In one body. And be thankful. And be thankful. Thankfulness.

[36 : 28] And peace. They are always. Twinned. Married together. In the thought of scripture. Let's pray. Eternal God.

We do give thanks. Tonight. For all the good things we know. We receive from you. And sometimes Lord. We fail to take account of. The many acts of kindness.

And goodness that you show to us. Forgive us Lord. We pray for. Our hurriedness in life. For a bit. Forgive us for. The many ways in which we.

Hasten to the things of the world. Instead of pausing to think on. How much we have to give thanks. To God for. We ask oh Lord. That you would. Continue to guide us.

In the way through life. That we may continue to offer. To you. Our sacrifice of thanksgiving. That we may order. Our way of rightly. So that we may be guided.

[37 : 25] More into. Into more of. The knowledge and understanding. And application of your. Salvation to us. Receive us now we pray. And hear.

The prayers of your people. Here and in all other gatherings. Of your church tonight. Where people have addressed you. Sincerely in prayer. In Jesus name. Amen.