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Thank You!

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TEXT: Psalm 100 (ESV)

A Psalm for giving thanks.

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth!

Serve the Lord with gladness!

Come into his presence with singing!

Know that the Lord, he is God!

It is he who made us, and we are his;

we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving,

and his courts with praise!

Give thanks to him; bless his name!

For the Lord is good;

his steadfast love endures forever,

and his faithfulness to all generations.

Thanksgiving is coming up in just a few short days. It's a time of family and food and football, but most importantly of all, it's a time to stop and give God thanks. You know the history behind this holiday: in 1621, the pilgrims, led by Governor William Bradford, organized the first Thanksgiving celebration. It was actually three days in length, giving thanks to God for the harvest. Thanksgiving was eventually declared a national holiday by President Abraham Lincoln in 1863, and we've been observing it ever since as a nation.

Have you noticed, though: giving thanks doesn't always come so easy for some people? There are a variety of reasons for that, I suppose... might be tough circumstances,

personal things like sickness or financial struggles, or the death of a loved one. And people wonder, "Why should I give thanks? What's there to give thanks for?" And then there's the big picture. We look around at the world and there's this pandemic, which has been so deadly, and a divided country in which we live, and rising prices; and some wonder, "Why give thanks this year? What's there to be glad about?" Let me remind you the awesome facts of the first Thanksgiving. Did you know that half of the number died the first year they were here in America? They had a hard time. It was a cold winter. Dangers lurked everywhere. But those pilgrims didn't think of the death of their loved ones and the dangers and the cold weather. They didn't let that obscure the blessings of God that they saw. They got together and they thanked the Lord for the blessings they had. I'm reminded of a story Pastor Henry Mitchell told about the importance of thanking God, even in tough circumstances. He writes:

Many years ago, I want to hear Dr. Martin Luther King, Sr. King said his mother had told him to always thank God for what was left, and that was something to think about. If you got enough breath left to complain, you have something left. I thought that was very impressive, and made a mental note of it. Some years later, I went back to Atlanta to Ebenezer Church, and by this time, Dr. King had lost his two sons, A.D. and M.L., and his beloved wife had been shot to death right before his eyes at the organ in that very sanctuary. And guess what, the old man was saying that day? "Thank God for what's left." There's always enough left in life to make it worth living.

Another reason people might struggle with thanks, giving thanks, might be that they haven't been taught properly. Thanking doesn't come natural to us. Think about it. Parents have to work diligently at teaching our children to say "Thank you," don't we? And maybe some people's parents didn't pass that along to them, and maybe they didn't pass along a belief in God to their kids. Perhaps there's also a sense of entitlement. For some, it's a major problem today. The attitude is that "I deserve this. I'm entitled to it." And the larger our sense of entitlement, the smaller our sense of gratitude. And of course, there's pride, personal pride. "I made myself into the success I am. Everything I have I've worked hard for. I don't need to give thanks to anyone else but myself." And then there's covetousness. "I get so busy looking at what someone else has and comparing it with what I feel I lack that I become green with envy, and even begin to think that God is shorted me. So why give thanks?"

So, there are a lot of people wondering this holiday, “Why should I give thanks to God?” And Psalm 100, which we read earlier, addresses that question. It is actually labeled in your Bible as “a Psalm for giving thanks.” It's the only Psalm with that label. So as if the writer is saying, “If you want me to show you how and why to give thanks to God, let me show you.” That's why it's typically read at our Thanksgiving services, at church, it's a jumpy little psalm. A lot of energy to it. A lot of joy, a lot of truth. We find six imperatives in this Psalm exhorting us to worship God with thanks and praise. First one is “Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the Earth.” Joyful noise can be interpreted. Shout to the Lord raised the roof. How about that – doesn't sound too staid or dignified, does it? Don't hold back. Shout to the Lord something joyful like “God, you're wonderful, majestic, you're marvelous. By the way, notice that this exhortation is addressed to all the Earth – it's not just to Israel – meaning all the nations, all peoples. Everybody is encouraged to give thanks to God. This is God's ultimate desire, by the way, it's his vision: all the families of the Earth worshipping him. We go back to Abraham in Genesis 12: “I will make you a blessing to the nations of the world,” or Isaiah's prophecy in Chapter 56 describing all the nations coming to the house of the Lord for prayer and worship to him. This is his grand vision for the end of time. God is not just some tribal deity of Israel or of his church. He's the sovereign ruler over all the Earth. All of us are under his gracious rule. All of us are recipients of his many blessings, whether we acknowledge it or not. He causes the rain to fall, for instance, for the harvest, upon the good and upon the evil. And God desires that all should worship him. And because of that, so do we desire that, as his people who have come to know him and tasted his goodness and grace. That's why the Psalm writer says, “Make a joyful noise all the Earth.” And we say amen to that.

And we serve the lord with gladness is the next exhortation. We call our time of worship a worship service, don't we? It's a service to God. God is the audience, not us. We serve him, gladly rejoicing in his greatness. “Come into his presence,” is another imperative. There God gives you the privilege of approaching his throne of grace. Fact is, he wants you to come to him. Go to church.

That's our next thing: “Enter his gates with Thanksgiving and his courts with praise.” He's talking about entering the temple. He's describing coming to church for worship with Thanksgiving and praise in our hearts, overflowing and shouting and singing to the Lord. Give thanks. Say it out loud. “Thank you, Lord,” for your Thanksgiving and bless his name, which literally means to kneel before him in grateful homage. So you

can't miss the point. It's to come and worship God and give him thanks and praise. That's what Psalm 100 is all about.

And then he gives us reasons for doing this. There are several reasons. Pastor Jim Bjorge writes, in his book *Forty Ways to Say Thank You, Lord*,

God is not a lonely soul who needs your thanks or mine in order to maintain his composure and continue his gracious works on planet Earth. But he is deserving of our gratitude, and we need to say thank you in order that we might retain a proper perspective and balance – a sense of values in this world in which we live.

Here's the first reason we're given: know that the Lord is God. He alone is the one to God is what's being said here. All the other gods of the nations are merely idols, and they do absolutely nothing. But God, our God is living and active. He's our maker, constantly creating, sustaining, rescuing, and restoring his world. He holds this little planet of ours in the palm of his hand. Christians know this truth about God, from scripture and also from experience. And so, we rejoice in it and we point out to others who don't know it, "Know that the Lord is God." Frederick Buechner says so well, and he says, "In the final analysis, Christians are not necessarily nicer persons, we're just better informed." To know that the Lord is God.

Second reason, look at what he has done. He goes on and says it is he who made us, and we're his, we're his people, and the sheep of his pasture. This songwriter is saying we are the evidence – Israel – of God's greatness. Look what he's done for us. He's made us his own special people. We belong to him. Can you believe it? There is a gracious covenant relationship that's been established by God with Israel. It goes all the way back to Abraham, to Moses, where he says to the people after rescuing them, "I will be your God and you shall be my people." The psalmist is saying,

Look at this amazing grace towards us. We, little bitty insignificant Israel, are God's chosen people called to be a blessing to the nations of the Earth since the time of Abraham. And later on, he rescued us from slavery in Egypt, and he made us his priest to carry out his good purposes to be a light to the nations of the world. We, of all people, are key players in God's Salvation Plan to rescue his world, which has been stained and broken by human sin. Look at our history and what he's done for us and how he is stuck with us, even in our times of disobedience. He forgives us and he rescued us from Babylonian exile and we're the sheep of his pasture, which means God is our shepherd. He continues to

stand us, care for us, provide for us. He leads us beside still waters to green pastures down right paths. He walks with us through the valleys, even the valley of the shadow of death. And he's with us always, and we will dwell with him in his house forever. We have been blessed by this God of ours, and so the sense of people in the world, that's why we worship him. That's why we invite you to join us in worshipping him, he's great and he's gracious and worthy of Thanksgiving and praise.

By the way, this verse speaks to those of us who are in the church of Jesus Christ. Christians are of the New Covenant with God. Christ's death on the cross has established that, hasn't it? Jesus said on the night he gave what is known as the Lord's Supper to the disciples, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins." We're a forgiven people in Christ, God's own, bought with a price: the precious and innocent blood of Jesus Christ. And the Apostle Peter, who loved Jesus, tells us that those who have placed their trust in Jesus are now a chosen race, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation. We are his, and we didn't make that relationship happen. God did by his grace. We're saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, his son. And we also, like Israel, have been commissioned to carry out his purposes, haven't we? To bring the good news of what God has done for us through Jesus Christ and to make disciples of all nations? And we're the sheep of his pasture as well, with the same good shepherd who has laid down his life for us at the cross to make us his own. He's with us in all the ups and downs of life, promising, "I am with you always," carrying for us, drawing near to us, providing for us, protecting us from the evil one and preserving our body and soul. He's leading us to his father's house with many rooms, which he has prepared for us. And with him, we'll live forever.

Thanks be to God for all he has done for us. That's why I would give thanks. Finally, the psalm writer says, "And let's not forget God's character, for the Lord is good." He's not evil, not malevolent, but good. He desires good for you. You have a good God who is not only with you, but he is for you. His goodness is shown in his steadfast love, which endures forever. It's a constant. It's displayed in his generosity and kindness and ultimately the cross. His goodness is seen in his continuing faithfulness to this world and to his own, as rebellious as we may be. He does not turn away. He comes after us, and calls us to himself, and he walks with us through the ups and downs of life. And he always keeps his word. He's trustworthy. He's our solid rock upon which to build life. In other words, God is worthy. Because of his character, he's worthy of our thanks and

praise – not only for what he's done, but for his character as I consider all that God has done and all that God is.

I'm reminded of Luther's meaning to the first article of the Apostles' Creed, which is in the Lutheran Small Catechism. He writes,

I believe that God has created me and all that exists. He is given me and still preserves my body and soul with all their powers. He provides me with food and clothing, home and family, daily work, all I need from day to day. God also protects me in time of danger and guards me from every evil. And all this he does out of fatherly and divine goodness and mercy, though I do not deserve it. Therefore, I surely ought to thank, praise, serve, and obey him. This is most certainly true.

I want to give you the opportunity to give thanks right now, in this moment; to make a joyful noise before God by shouting, "Thank you, Lord." In this little litany that we're going to do together describing God's greatness and grace: when I say something about God, and I pause, then we say, "Thank you, Lord," as loud as we can.

Gracious God, you are God and God alone, actively creating and sustaining life.

Thank you, Lord!

We would and could not exist without you.

Thank you, Lord!

You have saved us through Jesus and made us your own.

Thank you, Lord!

You are our good shepherd, always with us providing and protecting.

Thank you, Lord!

Your steadfast love for us endures forever.

Thank you, Lord!

You are faithful, always there. Always keeping your promises.

Thank you, Lord!

And all God's people said:

Amen!