

"A SONG FOR GIVING THANKS"

I. Introduction

- A. While the theme of thanksgiving is found in many of the psalms, Psalm 100 is the only one that is explicitly identified as "a psalm for giving thanks."
1. Thanksgiving is not exactly the same thing as praise or worship in general.
 2. In fact, we could even say that thanksgiving is the culmination of worship.
 3. Listen to the way one scholar of Reformed liturgy explains this: "There is a real distinction between thanksgiving and the praise and adoration that is our first response on being confronted with the majesty of God. When we are first confronted with his majesty, we respond with awe and wonder; but when we have experienced his grace, then we know the God to whom we render thanks... Thanksgiving is the public recognition of having received God's help in a time of need... The praises that celebrate his mighty acts, the witness to his salvation, the celebration of his works, the confession of his truth, and dedication to this service are the end of the experience that begins with adoration. When we have come to this point, then thanksgiving to God is the completion of human existence." [Hughes Oliphant Old, in *Give Praise to God*, 422]
 4. In other words, while praise has to do with glorifying God for who he is, thanksgiving is about expressing appreciation to God for the things that he does for us.
- B. Psalm 100 gives us a number of insights into the important role that thanksgiving plays in our worship of God.

1. It also helps us to understand why the entire Christian life can be summed up under the heading of “gratitude,” as it is in the Heidelberg Catechism.
2. As we study this psalm tonight, I want us to consider what it teaches us about how to give thanks, why we give thanks, where to give thanks, and the God to whom thanks are due.

II. How to Give Thanks

- A. The focus in the first two verses of the psalm is upon how to give thanks.
 1. The psalm begins with a summons for God’s people to “Make a joyful noise to the LORD.”
 2. A more literal translation would be, “Shout to the LORD.”
 3. The psalmist is drawing upon an image that was quite familiar to people in the ancient world: the image of a people greeting their king with a shout, often in celebration of a great victory.
 4. This is what we are doing when we gather together to worship the Lord.
 5. We are celebrating the great victory that God has won on our behalf.
- B. For this reason, our worship should be fervent and exuberant.
 1. It should be joyful.
 2. This does not mean that we should always expect to be happy when we worship.
 3. Our happiness depends on our circumstances, but joy can be present even when our circumstances are not very happy.

4. We see a good example of this in the prophecy of Habakkuk, where the prophet says this: "Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation." (3:17-18)
 5. The kindness that God has extended to us in the gospel of his Son gives us good reason to be glad.
- C. The Bible makes it clear that true worship needs to spring from true religious affections.
1. You may know that we Calvinists are sometimes dismissed as the "frozen chosen" because of the seriousness of our worship.
 2. But the fact of the matter is that Calvinists have always had a high regard for the proper engagement of the emotions in worship.
 3. Calvin himself said, "It is not sufficient to utter the praises of God with our tongues, if they do not proceed from the heart." [cited by W. Robert Godfrey, in *Give Praise to God*, 360]
 4. And the Puritan Richard Sibbes said that "Outward worship without inward is but the carcase of worship." [cited by Godfrey, 360]
 5. True Calvinism embraces what the Bible has to say about the need for the heart to be engaged in worship.
- D. The problem with much of the worship that might be thought of as "exuberant" these days is that it uses manipulative techniques to stir up the emotions of worshippers.
1. Songs are often used to set a certain mood.
 2. But this is not what we find in the psalms.

3. The songs of the psalter focus our attention on the Lord, not on our emotions.
 4. As Robert Godfrey explains, "In the psalms (and many great hymns), praise focuses on God, his character, and particularly his great acts in history... In much contemporary Christian music, emotion is the object of the song. The emotions engendered by the music become a new sacramental connection to God." [370]
 5. True affections of the heart spring from faith as we look away from ourselves to God's being and his mighty works in salvation.
 6. This is why the best hymns and the richest prayers are those that are chock full of biblical truth.
- E. Another aspect of thanksgiving is expressed by the use of the term "serve" in verse 2.
1. This Hebrew term carries various senses, including the service of laborers, slaves, soldiers, and subjects, the service that the Levites offered in the temple, and the service that a worshipper renders to his god.
 2. The parallelism of this psalm makes it clear that the service being talked about here is the service that we offer to God in worship.
 3. When God's people gather together on the Lord's Day we express our gratitude to God by offering our service to him.
 4. This is why the writer of Hebrews refers to worship as "a sacrifice of praise." (Heb. 13:15)
 5. And this service that we offer in public worship is to spill over into every other area of life, so that our very bodies are offered up "as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God." (Rom. 12:1)

III. Why We Give Thanks

- A. We turn now to verse 3, where the focus is upon why we give thanks to God.
 - 1. It is significant that this verse begins with the word “know.”
 - 2. This reminds us that true thanksgiving needs to be based upon knowledge of who God is and what he does.
 - 3. In other words, worship should be confessional.
 - 4. It needs to be connected to our confession of faith.

- B. The psalmist begins his confession of faith by saying that “the LORD, he is God!”
 - 1. Yahweh, the God of Israel, is the one and only true God over all the earth.
 - 2. This is why all the peoples of the earth are summoned to worship the Lord in verse 1.
 - 3. This psalm claims the entire earth for God.
 - 4. Remember that the psalmist made this confession while surrounded by nations that worshipped all sorts of false gods.
 - 5. We are in a similar situation today.
 - 6. We live in an age in which it is highly offensive to say that the God who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ is the only true God and that the gospel is the only way of salvation.
 - 7. This is why our worship needs to be built on the same confessional foundation as the worship of the psalmist.

8. We believe that our God, the Triune God, is the one true and living God.
- C. In the next part of his confession, the psalmist says that it is the Lord “who made us, and we are his.”
1. There are two senses in which we can say that God made us.
 2. He is both our Creator and Redeemer.
 3. In the context of this psalm, it is clear that the focus is upon how God made us to be his covenant people.
 4. While all people were created by God, not all people can be called the sheep of his pasture.
 5. The psalmist's words are echoed by Paul in Ephesians 2 when he says that “we are [God's] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works. (v. 10)
 6. We didn't become God's people by our efforts.
 7. We are dependent upon God for our identity.
 8. This is an important thing for us to remember, because we are living in an age in which people are always trying to create their own unique image and identity.
 9. As a Christian, your identity comes from the fact that God has made you into one of his sheep.
- D. This point is beautifully expressed in the second half of verse 3, where the psalmist says, “we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.”
1. We give thanks to God because of the grace that he has extended to us in taking us to be his people.
 2. As we draw near to worship him, we come with joy because we are confident that we really do belong to him.

3. While our worship should always be offered in an attitude of reverence, we express our praises with the assurance that God is kindly disposed toward us because of our union with Christ.

IV. Where to Give Thanks

- A. This brings us to verse 4, where we are given a summons that has to do with where we should give thanks.
 1. The psalmist says, "Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise!"
 2. The terms "gates" and "courts" refer to the temple in Jerusalem, the place where God met with his people in a special way.
 3. The Jerusalem temple was destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70, but this does not mean that God no longer has a temple.
 4. Now God's temple is the church of Jesus Christ, spread over all the earth.
 5. And just as the people of God in the Old Testament era were summoned to meet with him in the Jerusalem temple, so also are God's people today summoned to meet with him in local assemblies.
 6. This is why the writer of Hebrews tells us not to neglect meeting together. (10:25)
 7. While we should certainly give thanks to God at all times and in every place, we should not neglect the summons to do so in the corporate gathering of the saints.
- B. Verse 4 also teaches us something about the importance of preparing ourselves for corporate worship.

1. We are summoned to *enter* God's courts with thanksgiving and praise.
2. There should be a sense of anticipation and eagerness when we gather to worship.
3. The best way to foster this attitude is to spend time on Saturday evening or Sunday morning reflecting upon the grace that God has extended to us in Christ so that our hearts are stirred up with gratitude.
4. Remind yourself that it is an immense privilege to enter into the courts of the Lord.
5. Remember what John wrote as he described his vision of the new heavens and the new earth in Revelation 21: "nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life." (v. 27)
6. If you trust in Jesus Christ, then your name is in that book.
7. You have access to the throne of grace.
8. In worship, you are drawing near to God.
9. Never lose sight of what a blessing that is.

V. The God to Whom Thanks Are Due

- A. This brings us to the last verse of this psalm, where the focus is upon the God to whom thanks are due.
 1. The psalmist's description of God's character in this verse is the basis upon which everything else in the psalm is built.
 2. The use of the term "For" at the beginning of verse 5 tells us that this is the logical ground upon which our worship stands.

3. As we give thanks to God, we remember how his character is put on display in the things that he has done, continues to do, and will do for us.
- B. Three attributes of God are mentioned in verse 5: God's goodness, his steadfast love, and his faithfulness.
1. The Lord is good.
 2. Life is not always good.
 3. The Bible faces up to that hard reality time and time again, especially in the book of Psalms.
 4. But when we entrust our lives into God's hands, we can be confident that he will prove himself to be good.
 5. As it says in Psalm 34, "Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!" (v. 8)
- C. The second divine attribute in verse 5 is God's steadfast love.
1. This translates one word in the Hebrew, the word *hesed*.
 2. This word is used in the Old Testament to describe God's covenant love, the fiercely loyal love that he has toward his people.
 3. God's steadfast love is an expression of his character as the covenant keeping God.
 4. It is not anything in us that causes God to keep his promises.
 5. If that were the case, none of us would have any hope of being the object of God's steadfast love.
 6. Every time we sinned, we would be haunted by the fear that perhaps this was the last straw.

7. We would have to wonder if we had finally tested God's patience to the breaking point.
 8. But because our God is a God of steadfast love, we can take comfort in knowing that his steadfast love endures forever.
 9. If we cast ourselves upon him in faith, he will never turn us away.
- D. The third divine attribute mentioned in verse 5 is closely related to steadfast love.
1. The psalmist says that God's faithfulness endures to all generations.
 2. The main idea here is that God doesn't change.
 3. As Isaac Watts put it in his famous hymn, God is "our help in ages past" and "our hope for years to come."
 4. And Charles Spurgeon highlighted the trans-generational aspect of this when he said: "As our fathers found him faithful, so will our sons and their seed forever."

VI. Conclusion

- A. Psalm 100 shows us that thankful worship is rooted in an understanding of who God is, what God does, and who we are as God's people.
- B. We can only respond to God with a song of heartfelt thanks when we have some understanding of God's being and God's works.
- C. The more we "taste and see" that the Lord is good, the more will our hearts overflow with gratitude that is expressed in worship and in all of life.

