

THE SACRIFICE OF PRAISE

Hebrews 13:15

Intro: The first Thanksgiving day was actually three days in length, and the year was 1621. The Plymouth colonists set aside these days for both prayer and feasting. However, even before this, on December 4, 1619 thanksgiving was expressed in prayer by the members of the Berkeley plantation near what is now Charles City, Virginia. And it may have been that there were many other days set aside for thanksgiving which are not on record.

The first national day of Thanksgiving was declared by President George Washington, and observed on November 26, 1789. During the Civil War President Abraham Lincoln made it an annual holiday to be observed on the last Thursday of November.

Last year at our Thanksgiving Service I read to you President Lincoln's proclamation. In it he expressed his conviction that the Civil War in which they were involved at that time was a judgment of God upon the judgment of God upon the nation for their sins, and he earnestly called upon Americans to confess their sins and to seek God's mercy and pardon. Taking his place with the people of this country, he wrote:

We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven; we have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity; we have grown in numbers, wealth and power as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserves us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us, and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us.

President Lincoln called upon Americans to acknowledge their dependence upon God, to humbly confess their sins, encouraging them to believe that genuine repentance would lead to God's mercy and pardon, and ultimately to the restoration of the blessing of God. And he referred to that statement in "the holy Scriptures," as he called them, which declares,

Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance (Psa. 33:12).

But there is another verse, Psa. 144:15, which declares the same truth,

with slightly different wording:

Happy is that people, that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people, whose God is the LORD (Psa. 144:15).

What would President Lincoln say if he were able to speak to us today? And in the light of how he felt about the Civil War, that it was God's judgment upon the nation because of the sins of the people, should we not fear the consequences nationally for the way our country has gone with so many of our leaders and so many of our people in total disregard of God and His Word, doing what they want to do, and satisfied as long as they can have what they call, "the good life." Thinking of where we are today in our country, morally and spiritually, I am reminded of our Lord's words to the man He had healed who had not been able to walk for thirty-eight years. I feel sure Many of you remember what our Lord said. These were His words:

Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee (John 5:14b).

Not all physical problems are judgments from the Lord, but some are! And if you want to read something that will make you think, and strike you with fear for our nation, read what the Lord told the children of Israel in Leviticus 26. First He spoke of the blessings that would come upon the people if they obeyed Him, but then He warned them of the judgments that would come their way if they would not listen to Him nor obey His commandments, but would continue on despising His Word. Every American ought to read that chapter.

But many of our liberal theologians and unregenerate pastors will tell us, "But that was in OT times. God is different from that today." Is He? Was it not Jesus Christ, God's Son, Who told the man that He had healed that if he continued on in his sin, something even worse would happen to him? And does not the Cross itself tell us that God's attitude toward sin and sinners has not changed? The Lord Jesus Christ suffered the terrible punishment that we would have taken if He had not died in our place. The God of the OT is the God of the NT. Hebrews 10:31 tells us, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." And on to the end of Hebrews 12, and verse 29, we are told that "our God is a consuming fire." God never changes. And all that He told Israel was not just to be a warning to Israel, but it was a warning to all of the nations of the earth. *Why, in our Bible reading for yesterday, did the Lord go from speaking about His judgment upon Israel to speak of His judgments upon Tyre, and Egypt, and many other nations? It is because the same moral standards by which the Lord judged Israel, are the standards by which all of the nations of the*

earth is judged. What is sin in one country, is sin in every other country, because God is the Judge of the whole earth. And let us never forget this. Those were ominous words which President Lincoln wrote one hundred and forty-five years ago when he said very truthfully, "But we have forgotten God." Aren't we guilty of doing the same thing today? The consequences were dire then, and they will be the same now unless some great changes are made here in America.

This coming Thursday we as a nation will be celebrating another Thanksgiving Day. But to most Americans it will only be a holiday, a day to take time off from work. And for most Americans, there will be no prayer even at the beginning of their meal. However, for those of us who know the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior, it must be different. For us it needs to be a true Thanksgiving Day, a day when we thank God for all of the many blessings that He has been pleased to give us during the past year. For many it has not been an easy year, but for all we have much for which to praise God.

But we as the Lord's people must remember another thing on this Thanksgiving Day. And it is this: for us every day is to be Thanksgiving Day. We are to live lives of thanksgiving. One of the first things we need to do every morning is to give thanks to God, and it should also be the last thing that we do when we go to bed at night. The Apostle Paul told the church at Ephesus that they were to be

Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 5:20).

He told the Philippian believers,

6 Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:6-7).

And we find this exhortation in his epistle to the Colossians:

Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving (Col. 4:2).

To the church at Thessalonica, he wrote:

In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you (1 Thess. 5:18).

But such exhortations are not limited to the Apostle Paul, nor are they limited to the NT. One of the shortest Psalm, which is also one of the best-loved, Psalm 100, contains these words:

4 Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name.

5 For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations (Psa. 100:4-5).

And I almost chose as my text for today those two verses at the beginning of Psalm 92 where we see that thanksgiving continues on every day and every night, day after day. Listen to what those verses tell us to do:

1 It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High:

2 To shew forth thy lovingkindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night (Psa. 92:1-2).

So, if I may express it this way, *thanksgiving is an identifying mark of a child of God*. He gives thanks to God on Thanksgiving Day, but what he or she does on that day is what he does every day of the year.

Now let me take you to my text: Heb. 13:15. Here we see the exalted place which is given to thanksgiving not only by the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews, but by the Holy Spirit Who led the writer to pen these words:

By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name (Heb. 13:15).

Notice that here thanksgiving is called:

I. "THE SACRIFICE OF PRAISE."

This marks our thanksgiving as an act that is very sacred to God. The Jews had many sacrifices that they offered to the Lord. Some were animals. Some were produce that they harvested from their fields. Some were verbal expressions of their thanksgiving. And always sacrifices were to be offered in complete accordance with the directions that God had given to His people. For example, they could not offer a sick animal, or a deformed animal. The animals had to be without blemish. They had to be physically perfect because they represented the perfect Son of God Who came and offered Himself without spot to God.

But sacrifices were to be offered at specified times, such as, the Passover Lamb. There was to be a continual burnt offering, offered every morning and every evening regardless of what other sacrifices they were to bring to the Lord. And there were other requirements. But the word "sacrifice"

indicated something that was very holy to God.

One place this expression probably came from is the prayer that Jonah offered to the Lord from the whale's belly. You will find the particular statement in Jonah 2:9 where it is recorded that Jonah told the Lord,

But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD.

This very expression showed that since Jonah was bringing a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Lord, he had returned to the Lord in his heart. I repeat, the word "sacrifice" indicates something that is very sacred to the Lord.

OR IT IS
MORE
LIKELY
THAT IT
WAS
PSA. 50:14.
SEE ALSO
V. 23 (ANSB).

And when we offer to the Lord "the sacrifice of praise, we are doing that which is very pleasing to the Lord.

But notice a second thing about our text. Let me call your attention, your careful, undivided attention, to the words,

II. "TO GOD."

I hear people saying all of the time that they are thankful for this, or thankful for that, but it is very common for people to say that they are thankful, but not say *to whom* they are thankful. We need to be thankful to people for kind things that they do for us, but ultimately *all thanksgiving is to be directed to God. After all, every blessing that ever comes to us comes from Him.* We "praise God from Whom all blessings flow," as we sing in that well-known doxology. He gives us the food we eat. He gives us the clothes we wear. He gives us whatever abilities we have. He gives us our families. And most importantly of all, He is the One Who gives us salvation. It is God Who gave us His Son. He gives us the forgiveness of our sins. He gives us new life. He is making us like His Son, and we have His promise that we are going to be with Him in heaven, and that we will be like His Son. And we need to remember to give thanks to God for His Word, His precious Word which He gave long ago, and which He has preserved for us for almost 2,000 years. When we stop to count our blessings, we could actually spend all of our time praising the Lord.

And the longer we know the Lord, the more we learn that we can honestly praise the Lord for the trials He brings into our lives. It is in our trying times that we learn how wonderful the Lord is, and what it means to really trust Him. How thankful we can be for God Himself, and for all that He is doing for us day after day, and night after night.

And so we should not be surprised to see that the next word in our text is

the word,

III. "CONTINUALLY."

This is why I have said that for us, and it ought to be for every person on the face of the earth, *every day is thanksgiving day*. But we can be thankful that we have a national Day of Thanksgiving because it is a reminder to all of us that we need to be praising the Lord every day.

Now all of us have what we call "good days," but we also have many days that we would rather not have. There are things in our lives that we like, but we all have things in our lives that we don't like. Nobody like to suffer. Nobody likes to be sick. Nobody like to have unanswered prayers. But our text, in exhorting us to give to God "the sacrifice of praise ... continually is saying to us that there is never a time, never a circumstance, but what we have a reason, probably many reasons, for praising the Lord.

After all, isn't our God sovereign? And isn't it true that He always has purposes in what He does, or in what He allows to happen to us? And isn't His grace always sufficient? Isn't His love always the same? Therefore it is not surprising when we read what the Psalmist said in the first four verses of Psalm 145:

- 1 I will extol thee, my God, O king; and I will bless thy name for ever and ever.
- 2 Every day will I bless thee; and I will praise thy name for ever and ever.
- 3 Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable.
- 4 One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts (Psa. 145:1-4).

The more we praise the Lord, the more we will want to praise Him. It is a good exercise for all of us to go to the Lord from time to time, not to ask the Lord for anything, but just to praise Him for all that He is and for all that He has done, and continues to do, for us every day. Don't forget that word, "continually."

And then, lest we may have missed the full impact of what he has said, the writer states what he has said in other words:

IV. "THAT IS, THE FRUIT OF OUR LIPS GIVING THANKS TO HIS NAME."

That is an interesting expression, isn't it? "The fruit of our lips." We need to know that our lips bear fruit. And what does that mean? It means that what actually comes out of our lips is produced somewhere else. The Lord Jesus told us about "the fruit of our lips."

On one occasion He was speaking with the Pharisees who had charged Him with casting out demons by the prince of demons. And the Lord rebuked them in the strongest language. But finally He said, and you will find His words in Matt. 12:34:

O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things?
for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.

Notice the last words of that verse: "for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." You see, "the fruit of our lips" is what is going on in our hearts. And so this means that when we give thanks to the Lord, it must not be just in a formal, perhaps ritualistic way, but it must come from our hearts! The Lord knows if we are truly thankful because He knows our hearts. Our praise needs to come from our hearts, and the fruit is borne by our lips, even to God! We are grateful in our hearts. It is expressed by our lips, and that is when we are truly praising the Lord. And the Lord knows when we are just saying words, or that it is the way we feel in our hearts about Him. To give "thanks to His Name" is to give thanks to God for all that He is because if He were not the God that He is, we wouldn't have the blessings that we have.

We have reach the end of the verse, but there are still some words that I have not considered with you. They come at the beginning of the verse, and are very important to the whole subject of offering to God "the sacrifice of praise." Note the words,

V. "BY HIM."

Who was it to whom the writer was referring? The only way we can answer that question is by examining the verses which precede verse 15. And we find that in verse 15 the writer was speaking about "Jesus," our Lord Jesus Christ. And here the writer was saying that the only One through Whom we can approach God, even with our praise, is "Jesus."

If there was one thing lacking in President Lincoln's Thanksgiving Proclamation, it is that there was no reference to our Lord Jesus Christ. I am grateful for what President Lincoln said, but he could have said a little more because no praise, however sincere, is ever acceptable to God except that which is offered "by Him," by our Lord Jesus Christ. This is what we

need to understand when we close our prayers by saying, "in Jesus' Name," or "in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ." We come to God through Christ, and the only way we can come to God in prayer is through Christ. Therefore, those words, "by Him," are very, very important. It is the Name of His Son that attracts the attention of God when we pray, and even when we are praising Him. And this really means that only those who know the Lord Jesus Christ by faith as Savior, can come in His Name.

The last words we need to notice are:

VI. "LET US OFFER."

On down toward the end of the verse we have a similar statement: "giving thanks."

I suppose we all remember when our parents taught us to say "thank you." They had to tell us over and over again to say those good words: "Thank you." But do you remember how pleased they were when you started to say "thank you" without being told to say it. That is a real turning point in a child's training.

Well, that is the idea in these words, "let us offer," and "giving thanks." It means that we praise the Lord, not just because we are attending a Thanksgiving service, or because it is customary to bow our heads and thank the Lord for our food. But we thank the Lord because we want to thank Him. He is not pulling it out of us (although He does work in us), but we are so conscious of the many blessings that He gives us, that we want to return to Him our sincere thanks for all of His goodness to us. We can recognize the blessings of the Lord because it is our duty, but such obedience does not bring joy to the Lord's heart. He is pleased when we give thanks to Him because *we want to!*

Concl: This is really a wonderful verse, isn't it? And, coming as it does at the end of this epistle to the Hebrews, it certainly means that we need to give thanks to our wonderful God through Jesus Christ for all of the blessings that we have because of the High Priestly work of our Lord Jesus Christ Who by one offering has perfected forever those who believe. So at this Thanksgiving time, and then throughout the year, day by day and night by night, let us continually thank God for all of the blessings we have in salvation. If you do not know the Lord as your Savior, then come to Christ now, believe in Him, and then offer Him your thanks.