

### Why Give Thanks?

Turn to Ps 30 please. Would you describe yourself as regularly thankful to God? Would the people around you, who know you well, describe you as someone who often thanks God? Would we describe our church as a thankful church? I don't know, not particularly I don't think.

That is not my natural response to God. I began to see a few years ago that the Bible said much about thanks, but there was not much coming out of me. God has been calling me this way for a while, and that certainly happened again this week.

Why would we thank God for what he's done for us? Just because he said so? Yes, that would be enough, but there are two other reasons floating around in Scripture that we'll talk about today.

We give thanks to reciprocate, and we give thanks to educate. We give thanks to God because we owe it to him. By providing for us, our bodies and our souls, our present and our eternal future, he has earned our thanks.

What I have come to see is that God considers himself repaid for his provision. He keeps providing for us, and we keep thanking and honouring him for what he gives. The relationship carries on like that, eternally. By not thanking him, we ignore our side of the relationship.

That's reciprocate, we thank him because he's earned it and we owe it. We also thank God to educate ourselves. God provides so faithfully that we lose touch. We forget how much we receive from him, and we get foolish. We get a lopsided view of our relationship with God.

If I do not thank and honour God regularly, my mind is partly clouded by foolishness and darkness. My knowledge of God is missing something important. We thank God to educate ourselves. If I am not thanking and praising God, I may think I know him, but I am still missing something important.

We thank God to reciprocate, to give God what he's earned and we owe, and we thank God to educate ourselves, to save ourselves from foolishness and darkness.

Ps 30:8-12 *To you, Lord, I called; to the Lord I cried for mercy:*

<sup>9</sup> *“What is gained if I am silenced, if I go down to the pit?*

*Will the dust praise you? Will it proclaim your faithfulness?*

<sup>10</sup> *Hear, Lord, and be merciful to me; Lord, be my help.”*

In vv9-10 the psalmist repeats what he prayed when he will in trouble. This prayer bargains with God. *What will you gain, Lord, if I am silenced? I would praise you if I live, but I can't if you let me die. Will the dust praise you, and proclaim your faithfulness? No, it won't.*

*But if you help me, I will praise you.* The psalmist knows that he has something God wants. He can praise God and proclaim his faithfulness. This is valuable to God, and the psalmist knows it. This is a fair exchange. If God rescues the psalmist, the psalmist will praise God and proclaim his faithfulness. We thank God to reciprocate.

Then vv11-12 the psalmist reports what God did, and then the psalmist gives God his due.

<sup>11</sup> *You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,*  
<sup>12</sup> *that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent. Lord my God, I will praise you forever.*

If you want to make a deal with God, don't promise great acts of sacrifice, promise to sing his praises and not be silent. I just used Psalm 30, but this happens several other Psalms, too.

Turn to Luke 17. In Luke 17 we read a story of ten lepers who came to Jesus for to be healed of their very serious skin disease. The important part of this story is in what happened after the ten were healed.

*Lk 17:11-19 Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."*

*One of them ... came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him.* This is what we do when we came to church this morning. God cleansed us eternally, so every week we come back, we return, we make an extra trip, and we praise God with our voices. We kneel at the feet of Jesus, and thank him.

*Where are the other nine? Has none of them returned to give praise to God?* This is not just bad manners. The nine are not simply being rude. This is a basic failure to respond to God. God earned it from all ten. That's all he wanted from them. God is not asking too much.

One of them reciprocated, a foreigner, a Samaritan. None of the Jews gave returned to give God praise. One reciprocated: God healed the Samaritan, so the Samaritan thanked and praised God.

We don't have to feel thankful. Don't lie to God, or fake it. On a dark day, you can still say this: "God, you have provided for my body, and for my soul. You have guaranteed my body and soul in the best place for eternity. Here you are with me every day. You have a right to my honour, you are worthy of all service. I worship and praise you, you are a glorious God, you have been unbelievably kind to us, and you do this every single day. Thank you; and again: thank you."

Turn to Romans 1. In Romans, Paul takes a few chapters at the start to set up the gospel. Why is it that people need the gospel at all? Romans 1-3 answers that. Turn to Romans 1:21. This is the beginning of the human downfall. We will look at Romans 1 to see how giving thanks to God is a way of educating ourselves.

Romans 1:21 *Although people knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.*

Remember the nine Jewish lepers, whom God cleansed but who did not return? Let's put them in here: *Although the nine knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.*

Their thinking became futile, and their foolish hearts were darkened. What if we are rarely thankful to God? We know God, in a sense. But if we are not thanking and praising God for what he has done and is doing and will do, our thinking becomes empty and our hearts get dark.

We don't experience any of that, of course. It feels like we're as smart as ever, maybe more so. But it is not true. We are becoming foolish and dark.

We give God glory, and thank him, to educate ourselves. At those times of honouring and thanking God, giving God his due credit for how kind and generous he's been with us, at those times we are experiencing true relationship with God. It may or may not feel "special," but in fact it is purer and truer relationship with God than almost anything we do.

If we don't have that regularly, we have lost sight of a basic ingredient of God. We thank and honour God to educate ourselves.

Deut 8:10 *When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you.*

If we don't praise God, this is what happens: Dt 8:17-18 *You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.*

How will we remember the Lord our God? *When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for what he has given you.* We do this to educate ourselves. If we do not praise and thank, we get foolish and dark, we believe that our skill and energy has produced what we enjoy. That is a common human understanding, and it is spiritual foolishness.

In Luke 6, Jesus said, *Love your enemies, and do good to them, because the Most High is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.* Will God stop doing good to us if we are wicked? No. Will God stop doing good to us if we are ungrateful? No. God is kind to all, no matter.

The thing is, I would have thought that “wicked” was much worse than “ungrateful.” What we must see about this line is that Jesus viewed “ungrateful” and “wicked” as a pair that belonged together. Being ungrateful is a more serious problem than I thought, and thankfulness is more important than I thought.

Leviticus 23 – You can turn to Lev 23. I am not going to read this, just talk about it. Leviticus 23 describes the seven annual festivals. They had seven celebrations a year in which they stopped work, and worshipped God and celebrated and feasted with each other.

Let’s talk first about their agricultural year. In Palestine, at least in those years, they had two growing seasons. The winter was cooler and wetter, and during the winter months they grew grain, particularly barley and wheat. This they harvested in our April and May.

In the summer it was hot and dry, and at the end of the summer, October like we’re in now, they harvested mainly olives and grapes and probably other things like that. So they had basically two harvest times a year, April-May, and Sept-October.

Three Pilgrimage Festivals – now I will pull together some things from other OT texts, especially Deut 16. Three times a year, for three of these festivals, the Israelites all travelled to the temple: (1) Passover and Unleavened Bread, those two happened at the same time, (2) Pentecost, and (3) Tabernacles.

But Firstfruits always happened at the same time as Passover and Unleavened Bread. So here are their three annual pilgrimage festivals, everyone travels to the temple:

First, in the first month of the Jewish year, at the beginning of the grain harvest, was Passover and Unleavened Bread and also Firstfruits happened at the same time. to thank God for the beginning of harvest, about the beginning of April.

Then they went home and had 7 weeks to harvest the barley and the grain, and then then they came back and had the second pilgrimage festival, the Festival of Weeks, Pentecost, end of May or early June, to celebrate and thank God for all the grain they had just harvested.

Then then went home for the summer, and came back in the fall to thank God for the grape and olive harvest. This was their third pilgrimage to Jerusalem, which they called the Festival of Tabernacles.

In the first and third of these pilgrimage festivals, Passover and Tabernacles, they also thanked God for rescuing them from Egypt and giving them Canaan. We’ll call that big picture thanks. They thanked God for rescuing them and making them his people and giving them a place.

But also remember that the calendar was built around their growing season, and that all three pilgrimage festivals also thanked God for harvest and for food.

What this boils down to is that their worship year was built around thanksgiving. They honoured God for rescuing them from Egypt, for giving them a land. They honoured God twice for the winter crop, one before it was harvested and again after, and they honoured God in the seventh month for the summer crop.

Their worship year went like this to reciprocate, to return to God to give praise and thanks. God had rescued them from Egypt, and given them land, and every year gave them their spring harvest and fall harvest. So like the Samaritan leper in Luke, they returned to God, to honour and thank him. That's how a good relationship between God and people works.

And their worship year also went like this to educate them, as we worship to educate us, so no one would become foolish and say, "My skill and my energy have produced this wealth for me." Rather, we would remember the Lord our God, because he gives us skill and energy and the ability to produce what we have done.

In this Israelite worship, they thanked God for immediate care, for taking care of them month by month, and they also thanked him for big picture care, for rescuing them many years ago from Egypt, and giving them the land. Let's thank God for immediate care and for big picture care.

One more Scripture today, Colossians 1. In Colossians 1 we find out how Paul prayed for the Colossian church, and that is what we'll look at. Colossians 1:9-14 is the prayer, and I will pick it up at v11. *[I pray that you will be] strengthened with all power according to his glorious might, so that you may have great endurance and patience, <sup>12</sup> and give joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. <sup>13</sup> For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, <sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

God's glorious might will strengthen us. For what? For great endurance and patience. And, for giving joyful thanks to the Father. God's glorious might will strengthen us for great endurance and patience, and for giving joyful thanks to the Father. And then God tells us for what we should give joyful thanks.

Thank you Father, that with you there is a kingdom of light. Thank you that you bring your holy people into your light. Thank you that your holy people have an inheritance from you in your kingdom of light. Thank you that we, here, in this little church, are also qualified to share in that inheritance, along with the rest of your holy people.

We were in the kingdom of darkness, every single one of us. But you rescued us from the darkness, you came to us there and got us out, you brought us into the light, into the kingdom of your Son, whom you love. Thank you for buying us out of the darkness, and forgiving us our sins. We give you thanks and honour for your mercy.

This is big picture thanks. This is not thanks for what God did this last week, this is big picture thanks. In the NT, most praise to God is not for his recent care. There is some, but most is big picture thanks.

The disciples returned from preaching, and told Jesus that the demons obeyed them. Jesus said, “do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven. Lk 10. Big picture thanks.

Big picture thanks does not come easily to me. My mind is filled with troubles I’m having right now, and God’s kindnesses right now. The NT is pretty steady in wanting to pull us out of that.

Thanks to God like the thanks I just read to God, big picture thanks, is normal NT praise to God. We do this for the same two reasons: to reciprocate, to give God his due, to give him credit for what he’s done; and, to educate ourselves, so we don’t become fools.

God has been calling me to these things for some time, for a few years, but it became more intense this week. God has been generous to me, lavish, in both immediate care and in big picture care. I do not want to be stingy in returning thanks and praise.

I have one thankfulness habit. On my dark days, the darker I feel the more important this is, I will not say one word to God about my troubles until I have thanked him for five things. At least one of those is for what God has given on that very day, at least one is a benefit of Christ’s first coming, and at least one is a benefit of Christ’s second coming.

That little habit has changed me quite a bit. More than I expected. And I hope these things will also shape our worship together. That big picture thanks and praise will become a standard part of our worship gatherings.

*Prayer: Thank you, God Most High, that we do not know about hunger. There is food in our refrigerators, our cupboards, and our stores. You have been so steady in this, and we give you honour and praise. We have clothing and shelter, and all of this we keep receiving, even today, from your hand. We could not possibly have a more faithful Provider than you have been to us.*

*Thank you God Most High, that with you there is a kingdom of light. Thank you that you bring your holy people into your light. Thank you that your holy people have an inheritance, from you, in your kingdom of light. Thank you that we, here, in this little church today, are qualified to share in that inheritance, along with the rest of your holy people.*

*We were in the kingdom of darkness, every one of us. But you rescued us from the darkness, you came to us there, and got us out, you brought us into the light, into the kingdom of your Son, whom you love. Thank you for buying us out of the darkness, and forgiving us our sins. We give you thanks and honour for your mercy. Amen.*