Thanks-Living

Psalm 113:3

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Consumer confidence is an important factor in maintaining a prosperous economy. When people feel good about the economy and their financial welfare, they typically make more purchases. And the driving factor for making purchases is based on the principle, "What's in it for me?" That's why advertisers appeal to self-centeredness. They know customers want to benefit from their purchases.

Consumerism works well for enterprising people, but Christians should be careful when they employ this principle in their Faith. That's because our choices don't just affect us; they affect others! Our Lord taught us to guard our choices, lifestyle, speech, and behavior. Jesus taught His followers to live unselfishly. God wants us to live in a way that will enrich both us and others. This is what adds sweetness to life. Let me illustrate what I mean from the story of the honeybee:

(Illustration) The honeybee is a tireless creature that expends its energy not only to manufacture saccharine for itself but also for others. And nature consists of an assortment of honeybees. For example, there is a kind of bee that flies to the field and extracts nectar from clover. He then soars to the rosebud to claim some of its sweetness. Next, he journeys into the meadow to retrieve what the daisy offers. He then pilots over the mountain and secures the liquid fragrance of the morning glory. He then buzzes back by an orchard and lights in a peach blossom. Then he rushes into his little laboratory where he'll blend it into the sweetest taste on earth—a taste that a king wouldn't deny. In the same fashion, you can secure God's treasure for your life and others if you're willing to:

Go to Abraham's tent and get some faith.

You need to visit Moses at Median and understand God's mandate for your life.

You need to sit with Job and learn of patience.

You need to stand with Elijah in that cave where you'll hear God's quiet, but reassuring, voice that He's not finished with you.

You need to visit the disciples in the Upper Room and make certain you're filled with the spiritual power that transformed the world.

You need to pause on the Jericho Road long enough for the Good Samaritan to demonstrate compassion.

You need to stand reverently before Calvary and gaze upon the crowning jewels of love and forgiveness.

And then, like that honeybee, journey to your prayer closet and blend it in communion with God. That makes some real honey! (Adapted from SM Lochrage.)

When Jesus taught the principles of His Kingdom in His Sermon on the Mount, He made certain to show that it involved "other-oriented" living. In other words, the life, speech, and behavior of Christians take their cue from above, while the practices of this perishing world originate from below. And this time of year especially inspires Christians to live differently from the selfishness of sinners. The seasons of Thanksgiving and Christmas teach the blessedness of sharing, giving, and ministering to others. And today's message calls for that unselfish, "other-oriented" lifestyle of thanksgiving and praise toward God. It should fill every avenue of our lives. That's why I'm calling today's message "Thanks-Living."

(Transition) I want to first discuss the who, how, where, when, and what of thanks-living.

I. The Who, How, Where, When, and What Of Thanks-living

A. Who should express thanksgiving?

The Psalmist answers that question by saying: *"Let the redeemed of the Lord say so."*

In Psalm 84, the chief musician declared, *"Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you."*

Psalm 135:1–3 says: *"praise him, you servants of the Lord, (2) you who minister in the house of the Lord in the courts of the house of our God."*

Revelation 19:6–7 says: *"Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory!"*

B. It's clear that God's people should bless Him, but it's also important how Christians should be thankful. And Scripture teaches us to bless Him with our heart, soul, tongue, hands, feet, and with instrumentality.

Psalm 138:1 says: *"I will praise you, O Lord, with all my heart."*

Psalm 143:8 says: *"to you I will lift up my soul."*

Psalm 71:24 says: *"My tongue will tell of your righteous acts."*

Psalm 63:4 says: *"I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands."*

Psalm 149:3 says: *"praise his name with dancing."*

And Psalm 150:3-5 says: *"Praise him with the sound of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals."*

We praise God from our innermost being to our outermost being. That's the who and how of praise now let's discuss:

C. Where Christians should praise God. There are plenty of Scriptures that identify the place of praise: the sanctuary, our prayer closets, our inner chambers, mountains, valleys, and so on. But there's a Scripture in Psalm 113 that summarizes it when it says, *"From the rising of the sun to the going down of the same, the name of the Lord is to be praised."* The Lord's name is to be blessed and honored in all the earth.

D. Now let me mention when Christians should express thanksgiving. And Psalm 89:1 answers that when it says: *"I will sing of the Lord's great love forever."* Thanksgiving and praise are always appropriate today, tomorrow, and throughout eternity.

Anybody can cheer when their team is routing the opponent, but it takes something special to rejoice over your team when they are forty points behind. Anybody can rejoice when their aunt wills them a fortune, but it takes someone special to rejoice when they owe their aunt a fortune.

There are times when life gets so gloomy, we don't know whether it's supposed to be daylight or dark. Our mind is pressured, our nerves are rattled, our heart is burdened, we're emotionally frayed, and everything seems against us! But that doesn't give us permission to complain or keep silent. That's when it's time to disregard the delirium, ignore all feelings, and reach deep down to the foundation of your Faith and praise God!

It takes a resurrection confession to see beyond the cross and bless God at all times! But when you know that *"the gates of hell cannot prevail"* against God's plans for you, you can make a resurrection confession of thanks and praise to God!

Listen to the words of the prophet Habakkuk. *"Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, (18)* ***yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior"*** *(3:17).*

When your life appears to be on "the rocks," exhibit a testimony that shows the world that your life is actually on "The Rock"! The world is looking for somebody to set the standard, and Christians, who Jesus said were the "salt and light of the world," should set it.

> Astrophysicists study the solar system by launching spacecraft and peering through telescopes.
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> Marine biologists study the oceans by descending into the depths in submarines.
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> Microbiologists study unseen microorganisms with microscopes.

> And God distinguishes believers from unbelievers by testing their hearts during times of crisis. He's looking for Christians to trust him in all things; he's listening for thanks and praise regardless of what life deals us.

When life turns sour, you and I have the opportunity to become a living epistle and declare: "If you want someone to model triumph during tragedy and praise during adversity, then watch me, I'll live it"! We are called to be the people of praise twenty-four hours a day!

(Transition) That's the who, how, where, and when of thanksgiving, now, let's discuss:

E. What Christians should thank God for. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 answers that when it says: *"give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."*

(Illustration) When I was a boy, I remember the hymn that said, "If I could count my blessings, and name them one by one, I'd tell the world what Christ has done." Everyone got excited during that song, but in truth, its message was flawed! The reason that song is unscriptural is because **we can count our blessings**!

(Transition) For the remainder of today's sermon, let's consider some of God's blessings. For example, we should offer, Thanks for God's protection.

II. Thanks for God's Protection

Some years back, the memorable Paul Harvey related the following narrative on his broadcast, The Rest of the Story. I believe you'll find it interesting.

(Illustration) It involved the Westside Baptist Church Choir in Beatrice, Nebraska, on March 1, 1950. Mrs. Paul directed the choir, and her daughter Marilyn was the pianist. Neither had been tardy for practice; quite the contrary, they were always fifteen minutes early. While Mrs. Paul made last-minute preparations, she called for Marilyn to come downstairs. The minutes continued ticking away, and it was 7:15 before Mrs. Paul discovered that Marilyn hadn't answered because she was sleeping. They would be late and break their perfect record of punctuality. But there were eighteen members in the Westside choir, and each one was late. Ladona Vandegrift was always early too, but as a high school

sophomore, she was home, contending with a geometry problem. Royena and Sadie Estes were sitting in the driveway with a car that wouldn't start. Mrs. Schuster was always ten minutes early, but a missionary meeting detained her. Herb Kipf felt the urgency to write a letter he had procrastinated in writing. March 1 was a cold night in Nebraska, so Joyce Black was waiting for the last possible minute to leave the house and hurry into the sanctuary. Harvey Ahl's wife was away, so he and a friend were out dining. Time slipped by, and Harvey was late. Lucy and Dorothy were neighbors. Lucy was listening to a radio program that ended at 7:30. She couldn't leave the program without hearing its ending. So they were late. The only reason Pastor Klempel and his wife were tardy was that his watch was running five minutes slow. And the remaining eighteen choir members had their excuses. It was unprecedented. Nobody showed up for practice at 7:30 p.m. at the Westside Baptist Church. The precise time the Church's gas furnace exploded, which was located directly under the choir loft! That is, the empty choir loft! (Paul Harvey Jr., *The Rest of the Story*, Published by Bantam Books.)

Who protected the Westside Baptist Church Choir? Let's permit the Psalmist to answer that once again:

Psalm 121

I lift up my eyes to the hills—
where does my help come from?
(2) My help comes from the LORD,
the Maker of heaven and earth.
(3) He will not let your foot slip--
he who watches over you will not slumber;
(4) indeed, he who watches over Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.
(5) The LORD watches over you--
the LORD is your shade at your right hand;
(6) the sun will not harm you by day,
nor the moon by night.
(7) The LORD will keep you from all harm--
he will watch over your life;
(8) the LORD will watch over your coming and going
both now and forevermore" (NIV).

Whenever we're kept completely from the clutches of evil, like the Westside Baptist Choir, know that it's God's preserving providence. At times, God's wisdom and power ordain it. But remember, there's deliverance for us even in the face of apparent defeat.

> The prophet Naboth was murdered.
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> Stephen, the evangelist, was stoned.
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> The Apostle Paul was beheaded.
>
> And the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified.

Despite apparent defeats, they were all delivered! The sweetest deliverance available isn't necessarily eluding a near-death catastrophe or repelling the assassin's bullets, and it's wonderful when it happens. But God uses death to separate us from this sphere of evil and deliver us into the awaiting city of love, peace, protection, and joy. And that's the ultimate victory over this world.

> How else could Paul write under the Spirit's inspiration, just days before his beheading, *"The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom" (4:18)?* Paul was accepting his transfer from the domain of evil to the shores of peace and protection.
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> It's why Paul taunted the cemetery in 1 Corinthians 15 when he said: *"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O grave, is your sting?" (55).*

(Transition) We should not only thank God for His protection, but also for His redemption.

III. Thanks for Redemption

I want you to notice how the Apostle Paul gave thanks for his salvation in 2 Corinthians 9:15. Paul said, *"Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!"* It sounds like this great Apostle, never at a loss for words, was nearly speechless here. Did you catch that? Listen again: *"Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!"*

When Paul paused to consider the wonderful plan of salvation, it appears he laid down his pen, scratched his head, and threw up his hands in exasperation and said: *"Jesus is indescribable! His wonderful work of redemption is indescribable! It's beyond description! All I can say is "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!"*

Isn't that the truth? When you consider that the sinless, holy, eternal Son of God left the splendors of heaven to die on the cross for your sins, you just have to say, *"indescribable"!*

(Illustration) Years ago, there was a poor Scottish woman who maintained a spirit of praise. She enjoyed supporting the Pastor's sermon by interjecting "Praise the Lord" or "Amen." You would think the Pastor would welcome this verbal affirmation, but he didn't. He considered it annoying. So on New Year's Day, he confronted her about her public praises. "Betty, I'm here to make a bargain. If you'll quit interrupting my sermons, I'll give you two wool blankets." Since Betty was impoverished, the offer was attractive. She agreed to the terms and remained quiet for the first several Sundays of the new year, picturing herself snuggling under those warm blankets. In truth, it wasn't that difficult since the Pastor was a boring preacher. But eventually, a visiting preacher, full of joy, ministered. He preached on the blessedness of forgiveness with fire and enthusiasm. And when he got stirred, Betty got stirred. She did all she could to restrain herself, but eventually those visions of blankets faded, and the glories of redemption brightened. Unable to contain herself, she jumped up and shouted: "Blankets or no blankets, Hallelujah!"

When we consider the glories of salvation, nothing should silence us. If praise is due anywhere, it's due toward redemption. Nobody could earn salvation. Moses Law couldn't redeem us. The Old Testament sacrifices couldn't expunge sin. Christ, and Christ alone, offered sin's full payment.

Conclusion

Whatever else we do, we must remember to thank God.

> That's why Ephesians 5:20 says it's imperative to: *"always [give] thanks to God the Father for everything."*

That's why Philippians 4:6 says: *"in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."*

That's why Colossians 2:7 says we should be: *"overflowing with thanksgiving."*

It's why Hebrews 13:15 says: *"Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise."*

Here's what I like about Thanksgiving that doesn't apply to other holidays. Christmas, New Year's, Independence Day, Mother's and Father's Day are each observed once a year. But for Christians, Thanksgiving isn't celebrated just once yearly. It's a 365-day *Thanks-living* celebration!

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