

This sermon was written by Rev. Albert VanDyken for Nov. 25, 1948 but not preached because he died suddenly the day before. The sermon was read to the Sharon Ladies Aid on Dec. 16, 1948.

Text: Psalm 50:23

Hymns: #189, 126, 300, 151 in the Red Psalter

- 1) Thanksgiving Day. A wonderful idea that we should have Thanksgiving Day, a day in which especially we praise God for His wonderful works among the children of man.
 - a. There is something that must precede thanksgiving if we are truly to be thankful. We must pray. Paul felt that order when he wrote the letter to the Thessalonians and tells them to pray without ceasing and then he wrote to be thankful in everything.
 - b. The Thessalonians undoubtedly recognized the wisdom of the exhortation that they should pray. They felt the need of that especially because they were under trial. When men experience trials they usually pray, even when they have forgotten to pray when they were prosperous. Even the children of God will admit that their prayers are often a little more fervent in times of stress than at other times. It is then especially that we feel our dependence on God and plead for His favor. We ought always to pray. We recognize that so that in the Spring of the year we came into the House of Prayer to seek God's benediction.
 - c. But it is not always equally clear to people that they should give thanks. However the one includes the other. If we pray we should give thanks. But prayer precedes the idea of giving thanks. People who do not pray cannot truly give thanks. True prayer is an acknowledgement that everything is ruled by God and comes from God. When this is not acknowledged, how can thanks be given? He who does not pray cannot give thanks.
 - d. That was true in olden times, it is true today. If folks have not prayed and thereby expressed their dependence on God how are they going to be thankful today? They may go through the form of Thanksgiving but the heart is taken out of it. That we are here today in Thanksgiving service presupposes that we have prayed to the Lord in the season that has gone by.
- 2) We should thank the Lord for His blessings. The Bible is just full of that thought. Have you ever taken notice of the fact how often the Bible exhorts us to praise God and give Him thanks? Praise services was a principal part of the worship among the Israelites. "Praise ye the Lord" is a continual refrain especially in the Psalms. If we would take the trouble to count the passages in the Bible which speak of praising God and thanking Him for His goodness we would undoubtedly find that there are more exhortations given and more examples set for the giving of praise than in regard to anything else.
 - a. It is evident from this fact that God wants us to be thankful. It grieves God when His people neglect to be thankful. We can understand that. We are created in the image of God and want to be thanked too in the things that are legitimate. It hurts parents when their children give no evidence of appreciation for the good they shower upon them. And what joy it gives us when there is a recognition for the good we do others. In a much higher sense this is true of God in regard to His children. They owe Him everything and God expects of them that they shall be thankful.
- 3) Now today is Thanksgiving Day. Our nation is having a national holiday. But millions do not use this day for the purpose for which it was originally intended. In the colonial days the whole population of white people in this country attended worship on Thanksgiving Day. And generally for years the President of the U.S. issued a proclamation that people should forgo their usual occupation and in their own accustomed places of worship, each in his own way, humbly acknowledge the mercy of God from whom cometh every good and perfect gift. Did it strike your attention that the President's proclamation this year does not urge people to attend their accustomed place of worship today? There is only a general statement calling on the citizens of the U.S. to thank the Almighty God for His bounties. We can understand that. There are millions who don't have an accustomed place of worship. Only a small percentage of people attend church on the Lord's Day. They do not acknowledge God in anything. What a shame, how empty any proclamation which calls them to thank God must seem to them. Scores will spend this day merely in eating and drinking and having a general good time without God in their thoughts. Now we may eat and drink and partake of the abundance which God in his mercy has given us, but uppermost in our thoughts should be the fact that God is our benefactor and God is the source of our bounty. And only they who are of the spirit can thank God as they ought and enjoy His approval. The Christian can be thankful for blessings received. It takes grace to do that, it takes faith to be thankful but the Christian has both.

Thanksgiving

- I. The Reason for It
 - II. The Expression of It
 - III. The Result of It
1. The psalmist wrote "Whoso offereth Praise glorifieth me." The reading in the American Revised version is "Who so offereth the sacrifice of thanksgiving glorifieth me." This is possibly the better translation.
 - a. Our text has an O.T. setting. It speaks of a thankoffering. Among Israel there were many types of sacrifices. Among them the thankoffering which should be given to God to glorify Him and enjoy His favor. Therefore every true Israelite never neglected to offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving.
 - b. The thankoffering was a symbol of the fact that the offerer was at peace with God and God with Him. True Thanksgiving today is an expression of the same fact. A man must be at peace with God, in Christ Jesus, if he is to be able to thank God rightly for His benefits. This lies at the base of all thanksgiving.
 - c. We must thank God. Thanksgiving and complaining. These words express two possible attitudes of men in regard to God's dealing with them. The soul that gives thanks to God can find comfort in everything, but the soul that complains can find comfort in nothing. Thanksgiving therefore implies satisfaction with God and peace in Him.
 2. This is the first necessity, but the second thing which is necessary is to recognize and acknowledge God in the things which we have and which we receive.
 - a. People in this country usually aren't hesitant to declare that we have things and have many privileges. As a matter of fact we are quite generally boastful about it. This is true of the higher brackets of society, but also even of the lower brackets. It often happens that people go into flights of oratory when they begin to talk about the natural resources of our land.
 - b. We as Americans boast that within the boundaries of our country we have almost all the varieties of climate and of natural resources which the world offers men. As a matter of fact it is often said that if all the countries of the world boycott us in trade, we could get along without them admirably. Other countries may have a few natural wonders which we do not possess, but for variety and abundance of the gifts of nature, no other country can equal us.
 - c. Men point to our mineral resources, our western forests, our great expanses of farm lands which have produced heavily this year, we are reminded that even deserts have been made productive because our streams have been harnessed for irrigation and at the same time those same streams are great sources of power, so that great networks of electrical wires carry this power into almost every corner of our land. All this and much more is ours to enjoy.
 - d. Now all this may be true. We have much, we have in abundance. But we so easily forget that the earth and the fullness thereof belong to the Lord. We forget that all that we have has God as its Almighty source. And when men forget that, how can they be thankful today? To be thankful demands that we acknowledge God in everything. We need eyes to see and faith to acknowledge God in all of these things. Because men do not acknowledge God in the bounty we have received, they not only use, but abuse that bounty.
 3. To be thankful we must be shot through with the thought that God is good to us. We must be awake to the blessings we have received. We often sing "Count your many blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord has done." But most people who sing that hymn don't make it a practice really to count their blessings and some doubt whether they have any. Let us not be that way. (It is a good thing for all of us once in a while to stand still and meditate on the abundance of blessings we have received. It will help us appreciably to be thankful.
 - a. Blessings. We have enjoyed them in abundance in various spheres. Thank of the temporal blessings which we have enjoyed. These are secondary but they are important and valuable. Think of life. God gave it to us and preserved it. Health. A wonderful blessing. What would you take for life and health? A million or two? When we consider, surely we know that all the material wealth in the universe is not as valuable to us as life and health. When we think of them and consider whence they come, if our hearts are right we'll say with the psalmist "What shall I render to the Lord for all of his benefits toward me."
 - b. God is good to us. He has provided for our land. Did not generally speaking, our fields bear well? Really when we read the statistics on staple foods grown, the great abundance astounds us. Here and there

there were crop failures but in general we certainly have reason to be grateful for the abundance of harvest. Who gave us this harvest? Was it not God who gave us this harvest? Was it not God who gave the sunshine and the rain who cares for the fertility of the soil, causing the seed to sprout the plant to grow unto maturity? Wonderful blessings.

- c. In this country of plenty where God in His providence placed us, we ought to be grateful for the measure of peace that we have enjoyed. In a world of turmoil and unrest we were permitted to go about our tasks unmolested. How much better it is here than in many nations of the world? Spain is in an upheaval still. France is about to break forth in revolution, in China thousands are being murdered by the cruelties of internal war. Across the seas there are still thousands whose eyes are hollow and cheeks pinched because of the aftermath of the war. How thankful we should be for the display of God's mercy to us.
 - d. Add to this our spiritual privileges. These are the greatest even though we do not always consider them to be such. We enjoy freedom of religion. Not all Christians in the world enjoy this blessing, In certain sections of the world men are penalized for the Christian faith. Do we appreciate our blessings as we ought in this sphere? Are we ready to thank God for the light of the Gospel, for the privilege of meeting from Lord's day to Lord's day without being hindered, for the blessings of the open Bible, the protection of our rights in religion, for our schools, etc. Our blessings are more than we can count. Thank God them all.
4. Some, however, will whisper, but there were many bitter and hard experiences. So even if there may be reason for gratitude, there is also reason and sometimes much reason to complain.
- a. Complaining always has in it the element of fault finding. Webster says that to complain means to make a charge or an accusation. It is not merely attacking the thing we have to bear, but it is find fault with the agency that lies behind it. If we would analyze the true nature of complaining, we would find that it is based on a subtle fault finding with God.
 - b. Now these bitter things which we sometimes experience, what must we say of them? Must they hold us back from gratitude? Decidedly not. For God's children they are blessings in disguise. But it takes a lot of grace to see it and to be thankful for what hurts us. However we all know what it is to be grateful to a physician for his treatment of our diseases, even though it may have to be painful. And no less we should be thankful to our Divine physician when He is obliged to give us bitter medicine to cure our spiritual disease or to perform a painful operation to rid us of something which is harmful to us. In view of this fact Job said "Though He slay me, yet shall I serve Him." So let us be thankful and offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving now and always. God expects it and we have abundant reason to do it.

II. Thus we ought to remember our blessings and be thankful. We ought to offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving. If we are thankful, we ought to express it.

1. This ought to be done, but many neglect to do it. Only a small percentage of men really thank God. As the ten lepers; all receive blessings, but only one came to return thanks. Our Lord Himself was grieved of this manifesting ingratitude and said "Were there not ten cleansed, but where are the nine? Were there none found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger?" We have often possibly wondered at the ingratitude of those nine lepers, but what about the gross ingratitude of men today? Men pass by innumerable blessings without notice and do not return thanks to God. Let us as a people not do that.
2. Thank God. AND if we thank God we must express it. How are we going to express it not only today, but tomorrow and every day? The way is shown in our text. Our phrase more or less explains the former. How are we to express our thanks. The psalmist says by ordering our conversation aright. We are to take heed unto our ways. That man orders his steps aright who is careful that his conduct is in accordance with the perceptive will of God. To give thanks means more than bending the knee, more than keeping up the form of religion, it demands the heart and the attitudes and practices of our lives.
 - a. To thank God demands first of all that we recognize and acknowledge God in all our ways. It means to give God His rightful in the universe which He has made. It means that men must give up worshipping the gods of wealth, of power and of pleasure.
 - b. To thank God secondly demands that men learn to know themselves as they really are, children of dust, passing as a shadow through the world. They must learn to know themselves as creatures who have the breath of life in their nostrils. They must learn to know that they are subject and responsible to the living God in all their thought and actions. Besides they must learn to know themselves in the decrepitude of their sin, unworthy of any good thing. There is a great deal of

shouting and of boasting these days of what man can do and of what nations are able to accomplish. But until men learn to know themselves as they really are they'll never be thankful to God for His blessings.

- c. To be thankful demands that we must draw nigh to God. This is a great and important element of the Christian religion. God invites man to come to Him and when we come to Him we must express our gratitude with our lips in song and in speech. Come to the Lord with singing, so we read. But this is not enough. We may not come to God empty handed. When Israel came before the Lord it came with gifts for God's worship, God's Kingdom. It must be so today. There are many who thank God with the lip, but little or nothing is ever contributed for the Kingdom of God. There are many who pay more for their thanksgiving dinner than what they contribute for God's Kingdom throughout the year. It ought not to be so, but it is so.
- d. But to contribute of our material possessions for the Lord's cause is not enough. We may give a great deal and yet true gratitude may be lacking. With our gifts we must bring ourselves. Our thanksgiving is not real unless it is accomplished with repentance and turning away from sinful quests, and following after foolish vanities. To be grateful demands that there must be an earnest desire to do the Lord's will. Our steps must be so ordered that it becomes evident that our delight is to serve the Lord. A life of devotion is the greatest evidence of gratitude.
- e. When we think of these things, what a farce the thanksgiving of many people is. Their hearts are far from God, they don't enjoy His fellowship nor do they delight in obedience. Let us by the grace of God develop a true spirit of gratitude and express it by ordering our steps aright.

III. And if we thank God what purpose do we reach?

1. This in the first place, that we glorify God. Our text says "Whoso offereth the sacrifice of thanksgiving glorifieth me." Surely we ought to seek that above all. God is our benefactor. To glorify Him is the purpose of our creation and our redemption.
 - a. We glorify Him in thanksgiving, for in it we recognize that all blessings received are received from Him. If we received blessings because we deserve them, no thanksgiving would be necessary. But who is ready to declare that we are deserving. When we thank God we express that we are undeserving and what we receive cometh forth from His gracious hand. Nothing is ours by right, we possess by gift.
 - b. Do we acknowledge God in our blessings? How often we fail to see God in our benefits. People have often thanked their friends, their circumstances, or themselves for the good they enjoy, without thinking of God from whom in reality all blessings come.
2. Now to such who order their steps aright and glorify God, God will show His salvation.
 - a. This term salvation is used in a very broad sense and means blessedness. It includes the blessedness of Heaven, but this is not emphasized here. It emphasizes the truth truth that such will experience the blessedness of God in this world. The man who is thankful will here and now enjoy the fruits of it.
 - b. What blessings will be enjoy? Not necessarily material wealth, physical health, fame or reputation. God has never given that promise to anyone. But they that thank God shall enjoy that which is richer than wealth, fairer than health, and something more substantial than fame or reputation. He'll enjoy the favor and approval of God.
 - i. The blessing of having peace with God.
 - ii. The blessing that God cares for him.
 - iii. The blessing of a quiet conscience
 - iv. The blessing that all things are for his good.

Wonderful blessings.

Let us be thankful and thereby glorify our God and gain for ourselves the blessings which God has vouchsafed to them who offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving and order their steps aright.