

As Monday is Thanksgiving Day, we are having a service of thanksgiving this morning. To have a day set apart by the government for thanksgiving is a tradition that goes back many years. There was always a Christian influence for the practice of having a Thanksgiving Day, but, as the nation was never completely Christian, there are other influences as well. It was a practice among the natives of North America to have a feast celebrating the harvest. That is a pretty natural thing to do. Today in our pluralistic society, the significance of Thanksgiving Day will as different as the people of Canada are different. For many it is just a day off. For some it may be a celebration of the harvest. People from different religions will celebrate it as their religions suggest or perhaps ignore it if it is not part of their tradition.

But for Christians, it is a day of thanksgiving to God especially for the harvest. A special day of thanksgiving is not required in the Bible and so we are not obligated by God to celebrate it in exactly this way, but the Bible certainly does call us to thanksgiving and it is consistent with that to have a service of thanksgiving in connection with Thanksgiving Day and to meet with family and friends on Thanksgiving Day to celebrate God's bounty to us and to thank him for it.

It is worthwhile to consider what thanksgiving actually is and how central it is to the lives that God calls us to live. That it is central to the kind of life that God expects from us is clear from Paul's exhortation in 1 Thessalonians 5:18 where he writes, "[G]ive thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." Similarly in Colossians 3:17 he writes, "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." So we are to give thanks in all circumstances and in connection with everything that we do. Clearly God is looking for thanksgiving to be a central part of our lives.

So, while having a day of thanksgiving or a special service of thanksgiving is a good thing, thanksgiving itself is to be woven into the whole of our lives. This morning we will think about thanksgiving on the basis of David's words in 1 Chronicles 29:9-16. These words of David were written near the end of David's life. David had wanted to build a temple for the Lord, but God had told him that he wanted David's son Solomon to build the temple instead. So what David did instead of building the temple was to collect as many of the building materials for the temple as he could – both by his own donations and by encouraging the donations of others. It looks like David and the others concentrated on the expensive stuff, massive amounts of gold, silver, bronze, iron and precious stones.

This tremendous exercise in giving was a happy occasion. Verse 9 says "Then the people rejoiced because they had given willingly, for with a whole heart they had offered freely to the LORD. David the king also rejoiced greatly." These offerings were offerings of thanksgiving. In verse 13, David says, "And now we thank you, our God, and praise your glorious name."

We see here that thankfulness includes a desire to express our gratitude through a concrete expression of appreciation. We will be familiar with this in our relationships with other people. If someone does something

nice for us, it is quite natural to desire to show appreciation and often that appreciation is shown by means of a gift. This idea is expressed clearly in connection with thanksgiving to God in Psalm 116:12 where the poet writes, “What shall I render to the LORD for all his benefits to me?”

Thus the spirit of thanksgiving is a joyful spirit and the gifts that thanksgiving motivates are freely given. And that is expressed in a beautiful way in verse 9 of 1 Chronicles 29. “Then the people rejoiced because they had given willingly, for with a whole heart they had offered freely to the LORD. David the king also rejoiced greatly.” Thanksgiving is a joyful thing and the giving the thanksgiving prompts is cheerful giving that actually increases the joy of thankfulness.

Now, if we think about this connection between thanksgiving and joy and cheerful giving, it is clear that thanksgiving is profoundly relational. When thanksgiving is real, it is the love or generosity or kindness of the person who has given us some benefit that is the most important thing. The benefit is appreciated, but thanksgiving ties together appreciation for the benefit with appreciation for the person who has shown love or kindness to us. If the focus is entirely on the gift and not on the person who has given the gift, it is unthankfulness rather than thankfulness. When it is real thankfulness, there is a deep appreciation for the person who has given the gift.

That is why there is joy in expressing thanksgiving both by word and by deed. We want the other person to feel our appreciation. We want to connect deeply with the other person by means of our expressions of thanksgiving. And so in our text when David and the people rejoiced in giving their gifts for the building of the temple, it was because of the love and appreciation that they felt towards God.

Now there are many reasons for us to be thankful to God. Our lives come from God. The beautiful creation that is our home comes from God. The things that we need to maintain our lives come from God. And the fact that we have so much more than what we need so that our lives are filled with good things – all of that also comes from God.

But even more significant is our salvation. We rebel against God every time we sin. We defy God’s authority over us every time we fail to obey him. And we do that in the face of God’s overwhelming goodness and generosity towards us. And what does God do? He provides a way for forgiveness and reconciliation. He does that at a staggering cost to himself – the cost of giving his own Son to suffer the penalty for our sins. We can’t imagine the horror of Abraham offering Isaac as a sacrifice to God even though God stopped that from actually happening. But there was no substitute when God sacrificed his own Son. Not dealing with us according to what our sins deserve was unspeakably costly and painful for God. And he did that so we could be saved, reconciled to God, and embraced as his children.

Yes we have much reason to be thankful. But for that thanksgiving to be real, it must focus on God as much or even more than the gift of salvation. True thankfulness goes beyond appreciation for the gift to love for the

giver of the gift. It is deeply relational. There is a lot of joy in it. And it wants to express itself in both words and deeds.

Another facet of thanksgiving that we see in this text is that thanksgiving and worship go together. Of course, when we are thankful to other people, we are not to worship them, but we do think highly of them and we are inclined to sing their praises. But when it comes to thanksgiving to God, this characteristic of thanksgiving is all the more important.

Just listen to the language that David uses in verses 10-13, "¹⁰Therefore David blessed the Lord in the presence of all the assembly. And David said: "Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of Israel our father, forever and ever.

¹¹Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all.

¹²Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. ¹³And now we thank you, our God, and praise your glorious name."

David ends up saying "thank you" to God. But that thanksgiving is inseparable from his praise. David can't say enough about how wonderful God is. The words describing God's glory gush out of him. He acknowledges God's greatness and power and glory and victory and majesty. He acknowledges that God is the owner of heaven and earth. And that he is the king over all, that he is exalted over all. He acknowledges that God is the one who grants riches and honor and that he is the one who gives strength to all.

At the heart of thanksgiving to God is praise. There is a deep joy in saying great things about God. That is why praise and thanksgiving are so closely connected in the Bible. So we read in Psalm 69:30, "I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving." And Psalm 100:4, "Enter his gates with thanksgiving; and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!" Thanksgiving and worship are inseparable.

Now this gets at how we can enjoy God's gifts in a way that glorifies God. God gives us so many gifts. He gives us so much to enjoy. It is true that we also suffer – that there are things about life that are hard and unpleasant. In dwelling on thanksgiving we should not just ignore the hard things about life and the fact that suffering is a reality in life – in smaller ways for some and in greater ways for others. And yet Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 tells us to "Rejoice always ... [and to] give thanks in all circumstances." There is always reason to be thankful. If we are believers, we dwell in the grace and love of God. God is working everything together for our good. And "the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Romans 8:18).

But, while life can sometimes be very hard, it is also very good. We love and are loved. We enjoy the beauty of the creation, the satisfaction of accomplishments, the pleasures of food, the comforts of our homes, delights

of babies and little children, our own or those of others, a society of relative peace and prosperity, the smell of fall and the sight of the crops in the fields and on and on and on. There is so much in life to be thankful for.

And it is wonderful to realize that all of the things that we legitimately enjoy are God's idea. The enjoyment of sin is obviously not God's idea, but I'm thinking about the huge number of things in our lives that are pleasant and comfortable and satisfying and delightful that are not sinful. All of that come from God. He gives them to us for our pleasure and enjoyment. As Paul writes in 1 Timothy 6:17: God, "richly provides us with everything to enjoy."

Since this is such a significant part of our lives it is important that we are clear about how we are to enjoy the good things in our lives to the glory of God. There is a wrong way of enjoying the good things in our lives, but there is also a right way. And it is so important for us to understand that it is God's design that we enjoy his gifts in a way that gives glory to him. And the key here is the combination of thanksgiving and worship.

When Paul in Romans 1 describes the world living in ungodliness and unrighteousness, he says in verse 21, "For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him...." Unthankfulness is one of the characteristics of wickedness. It is enjoying the gifts without thanking or acknowledging the giver. So thankfulness is at the heart of a right relationship with God. God pours his blessings upon us and he intends for us to enjoy his gifts as part of a love-relationship with him. God pours out his gifts upon us as expressions of his goodness, faithfulness and love. The giving of the gifts is relational. And the enjoyment of the gifts must be relational too. What this means is that the gifts and the giver of the gifts are to be enjoyed together. God's gifts are personal, and they are meant to be enjoyed personally – that is the gift is enjoyed not simply as an unattached thing, but as an expression of generosity and love from God.

This is how we are meant to glorify God through the enjoyment of the gifts that he showers upon us. In giving us gifts, God is giving us something of himself. And to glorify him in the enjoyment of the gift is to enjoy God's love and kindness and generosity in the giving of the gift and to respond to that with gratitude and love.

Furthermore God's gifts all reflect aspects of God's glory. The gift of salvation demonstrates God's compassion and mercy and grace. The gift of our bodies with their capacity for pleasure and satisfaction demonstrates God's power and wisdom and his desire to give us joy and pleasure. The gift of the harvest demonstrates God's goodness and his marvelous ability to produce growth and fruitfulness from the earth. And so praise belongs with thanksgiving because God's glory is expressed in multiple ways in every good thing that we enjoy. We are to be grateful to God for all that he gives us, but we are also to be amazed at what he is able to do and what it all reveals to us about him.

So thanksgiving is at the heart of enjoying the blessings of life to the glory of God. When the gifts are enjoyed without reference to God - that is a great insult to God, but when gifts are enjoyed with thanksgiving to God, then God and the gifts are enjoyed together, and God is honored. To celebrate God's provision by thankfully

enjoying God's provision is a wonderful thing. But what makes it wonderful is the love relationship that is expressed in the giving and the thanksgiving. And the desire to say thankyou will be part of a broader desire to express thankfulness in other ways – to show by praise and service the reality and the depth of our thanksgiving.

Now in our text the thank-offerings were for the building of the temple. And the temple was the place of meeting with God on the basis of sacrifices. It is a beautiful thing to think of thanksgiving as it ought to be. But as we think these thoughts, we are aware of the fact that our thanksgiving is not as it ought to be. Even as God's people, who by God's grace know something of the relational delight of real thanksgiving, we will also be aware that we often enjoy God's gifts without thanksgiving. Sometimes we have a spirit of entitlement. Sometimes our focus is only on the gifts and God is not welcome in our thoughts. Sometimes we value the gift more than the love of God in the gift. Sometimes we waste God's gifts instead of using them in a stewardly way. Sometimes we say thank you, but our hearts are not in it. Sometimes we just take God's gifts for granted. And on and on it goes.

The reminder of the temple is a reminder that our relationship with God is not based on us getting anything right. We do not get thanksgiving right. Our thanksgiving is very imperfect. There is a lot of sin mixed with it. We insult God with our ingratitude as much as we glorify him with our thanksgiving. But God had instituted the temple and the temple worship in which the sacrifices were prominent. That means that God had provided a way of atonement – a way of forgiveness so that the people could thank him and worship him imperfectly and still enjoy a real relationship with God.

The temple is fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus is the meeting place between a holy God and a sinful people. And his sacrifice is at the center of that meeting. And so we can still rejoice in thanksgiving to God even though we know that our thanksgiving has enough wrong with it to condemn us even without reference to any other sin. The joy and the richness of thanksgiving can be enjoyed by us even though our thanksgiving and worship is very imperfect because of Jesus and his sacrifice which paid the penalty for our sins. And that of course is added reason for thanksgiving – indeed it is the greatest reason of all for thanksgiving and for worship. Indeed all the gifts come to us on the basis of what Jesus has done for us. So as we enjoy whatever we enjoy today and Monday and every other day, may our deepest joy be joy and thanksgiving for the love of God in Christ which makes it possible for us to enjoy life in relationship with God in spite of the fact that we are worthy of death.

One other point that this passage teaches us about thanksgiving is that true thanksgiving is also an expression of humility and dependence upon God. This passage has many expressions of the kind of humility which glorifies God. Verse 12, "Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule overall. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all." David continues in this vein in verses 14-16, "¹⁴But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you. ¹⁵For we are strangers before you and sojourners,

as all our fathers were. Our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no abiding. ¹⁶O Lord our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a house for your holy name comes from your hand and is all your own."

Thanksgiving is the acknowledgement of a gift and when it comes to God's gifts, everything that we receive from God is something that we do not have the wherewithal to provide for ourselves. "All things come from you and of your own have we given you." Our very existence comes from God. Our breath and our strength come from God. Our abilities come from God. The success of our endeavors comes from God. God determines if the crops will grow. God determines whether the economy will provide jobs. If we are healthy it is God's doing. If we are provided for, it is God's doing. That is why David says, "all this abundance that we have provided for building you a house for your holy name comes from your hand and is all your own."

This is a humble acknowledgement of our absolute dependence upon God. There are certain limited contexts in which independence is a good thing, but when it comes to the most fundamental things we are completely and utterly dependent on God. The continuation of our life from moment to moment is a gift from God. We accomplish nothing in life without God's direct involvement both inside of us and outside of us. And so it is profoundly true that whatever we give to God has come from God in the first place. That is why David here says, "For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you."

Real thanksgiving to God is an expression of deep humility because it is an acknowledgement of how dependent we are upon God. But that is a good thing. Notice again how this passage radiates a spirit of joy. Verse 22 says, "And they ate and drank before the LORD on that day with great gladness." To think of ourselves as self-sufficient diminishes our souls. To think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think degrades our very humanity. To know our place in relationship with God is the place of fullness and joy. And the reason of course is that we are meant to find our greatest joy in God rather than in ourselves.

And so the humility that goes with true gratitude is actually part of the joy of thanksgiving. It is good to celebrate the truth about our dependence on God. The heart of joy is to rejoice in the Lord and in how wonderfully he loves us and cares for us and provides for us.

So let us give thanks to the Lord. You can include a special thanksgiving in your activities on Monday, but everyday is Thanksgiving Day. May God help us to live lives of thanksgiving and may we know more and more of the joy that belongs to relating to God as his thankful people.