

The How and Why of Giving Thanks

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening again, and hopefully you've got your Bibles handy, but I'm going to have the verses on the screen nonetheless. And I don't know if you noticed, but our psalmist today is full of thanks and praise.

In fact, Psalm 100 is called the Jubilate because it's full of jubilation. But I wonder if that's how you're feeling at the moment. Because every time it seems when we turn on the TV or watch, look at Facebook or see the news in some way, shape or form, there's more news about vaccinations or protests or border issues or COVID case numbers.

Like yesterday, where Melbourne broke the national record for COVID cases. Yay, us! And as you've probably heard last Monday, Melbourne officially became the most locked down city in the world, beating out Buenos Aires.

Not that it's a competition, of course. And as the article says there on your screens, we've traded our title as the world's most livable city for this unenviable one.

And by the time we open up later this month, I'm not sure if you can see the print there, but we would have apparently spent 45% of the pandemic in lockdown.

[1 : 26] And so at this point of the pandemic, you may not be feeling full of thankfulness, but full of fed upness. Especially if you're living on your own or having to deal with extra stress because of COVID.

And so when we read this Psalm 100 or when Bevan read it for us before, you might have thought, man, when this guy wrote this Psalm, he must have been having a really good day. Maybe his parcel finally arrived in Australia Post.

Maybe he's going to be let out of lockdown tomorrow like New South Wales. But however you are feeling at the moment, giving thanks is something that ought to characterize our lives as Christians.

And we saw this from our second reading, that short one, where we're encouraged to continue following Christ as Lord, to be built up in his likeness, strengthened in the faith. And notice out of all the things Paul could have added, those last three words, what does he add?

Overflowing with thankfulness. You see, thankfulness is meant to mark our lives. But how and why?

[2 : 42] Well, our Psalm tells us. You see, the title of our Psalm today is literally a Psalm for Thanksgiving. It's for giving thanks because it teaches us how to give thanks, why to give thanks, and it was sung by Israel as a way to give thanks.

Now, I'm not going to sing it for you, and so you've already got something to be thankful for, don't you? But I am going to take you through it using those headings of how and why. In fact, the Psalm seems to be structured around those headings of how and why.

And so on your screens, we've got three commands about how to give thanks, followed by the reason why to give thanks.

And then it kind of repeats. Another three commands about how to give thanks, and then another reason why to give thanks. But we're going to group the hows and whys together.

And so point one, verse one and two, on the next slide, shout for joy to the Lord all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness.

[3 : 56] Come before him with joyful songs. Here are the three commands, the three hows to give thanks, to shout, worship, and come before God.

And the next three commands in verse four, he says, enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him. And the third one, praise his name.

Now for Israel, all this took place at the temple. That's where God especially dwelt. So that's where they would come before him. That's where his gates and courts were.

They're the gates and courts of the temple. And so that's primarily where Israel would have sung this psalm. In fact, it's where the psalmist is actually calling all the earth to come.

Because I don't know if you realize, but back in verse one, he actually says to shout for joy to the Lord all the earth. And so they're to do that by coming to the temple, to God.

[4 : 59] In other words, there's an evangelistic edge to this psalm, calling all people to God. At the temple. Of course, there is no more temple in Jerusalem.

And so even if Qantas flies there next month, we can't do anything about it. We can't enter the gates, can we? What's more, Jesus has replaced the temple anyway.

And so to come to God, we and all the earth must first come to Jesus to believe in him. And when we do, we're given God's spirit who unites us together in Christ, such that we become God's temple, both as a church and as individuals, which means we can give thanks in these ways, not just as a church on Sundays, but anytime and anywhere every day.

For example, verse one, we can give thanks by shouting for joy to the Lord, or as the New Testament often puts it, rejoice. We just sang that song earlier in the service.

And now I know for most of us, we don't like to show too much emotion, but it's okay to rejoice, you know, to shout joyfully in Thanksgiving.

[6 : 17] I mean, have you ever lost your wallet or purse or your phone? You know, it's, it's alarming, isn't it? After a while of looking for it, you start to panic because it's got all your credit cards, your license, your ID, it's got your life that someone can steal.

And then after a while you pray, usually, you know, after some time you go, Oh, I should pray about this. So you pray, please God. And then a little while later, it turns up in the washing basket or I don't know, somewhere else.

And when it does, when it turns up, or when you get that last car parking spot, or you get that great answer to a medical test or that answer to prayer, why not shout for joy?

Why not rejoice and say, thank you, God at non-Christians do it all the time. You know how you hear non-Christians say, Oh, thank God for this or that.

Let's reclaim it in a believing way and shout to the Lord, rejoice and say, thank you, God. Of course, we can also verse two, worship the Lord with gladness.

[7 : 28] The word worship here really means to serve. Israel would serve God at the temple, but as God's temple, we're to serve God everywhere, not just on Sundays, but every day.

I noticed it says we're to serve with gladness. So serving God is not meant to be a duty. It's meant to be a joy because it's part of our thankful response to what God has done for us.

We see this in the New Testament, where in response to God's mercy or in view of God's mercy, we are to serve God, to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, which is notice our true and proper worship.

And so we can give thanks by serving God with gladness in response to what is done for us. I've been so encouraged by the way people have offered to do that in lots of different ways, without realizing that they're kind of, you know, serving God with gladness as a way of thanking him.

For example, one person said to me, Andrew, please tell me if you ever need someone to read the Bible online, it is such a joy to do it. They were her words.

[8 : 47] Another person said to me that, look, Andrew, if anyone is in need during the week, I've got time. I'd love to drop things off to them. Please let me know. I'd really love to do it. Here are people who are so keen to serve with joy, love, gladness in response to what God has done for them in Jesus.

This is another way we can give thanks. Or verse two, again, at the end of verse two, we can also come before God with joyful songs to give thanks.

Anytime, anywhere. I know a lot of people from the morning service. I'm not sure how many from the 5 p.m. would do this, but after they watch this live stream morning service, they will turn on songs of praise, which often comes on about 11 o'clock on Sunday mornings, and they would just hum along to these hymns as a way of praising and thanking God.

Perhaps for younger generations, it's worth having some Christian music on your playlist, on your phone. It's much more edifying than secular music, and it helps you to praise and thank God.

I know it's not always easy to find good Christian music, and so if you need help, please ask. Of course, singing joyful songs out loud on our own can sometimes feel a bit weird.

[10 : 14] I guess it depends who you are. For some, it's okay, but some others, it feels a bit weird. I mean, in our house on Sunday mornings, almost every Sunday morning, my wife, Michelle, will sing out loud with the songs from the live stream service, and almost every Sunday morning, our kids will tease her for it.

Not because she's a bad singer, I hasten to add, but because it just seems a bit weird. You see, singing is better together, isn't it?

I mean, we can still do it on our own, but it is better together, because it encourages one another, as well as giving thanks to God. As Colossians says on your screens there, on the next slide, you know, let the word of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another through psalms, hymns, and songs.

There's the horizontal encouragement, one another. But notice, we're to do it also, singing to God with thanksgiving or gratitude in our hearts.

You see, so we can thank God by coming before him with joyful songs, which will be so much easier when we're back together, won't it?

[11 : 30] Bring on that day. Verse 4, the other ways we can thank God, we can, he says there, enter his gates and his courts, which we can no longer do, but through Jesus, who replaced the temple, remember, we can enter God's very throne room in prayer, can't we?

To give thanks, to praise his name, anytime, anywhere. To praise his name means to speak of his character, his goodness, his greatness.

But as we praise him, we often thank him at the same time, don't we? For example, if we pray, thank you, God, that you are sovereign and in control.

We're praising his sovereign character, but we're also thanking him for it at the same time, aren't we? And so praise is another way of thanking God.

Of course, we can enter his throne room, his gates, so to speak, in prayer to simply give thanks, plainly, for the things he gives us.

[12 : 39] And we'll be doing that a bit later. In fact, we've already started to do that earlier with those people, haven't we? In fact, the Bible encourages us to thank God whenever we pray.

Notice on your screens from Philippians 4, it says, do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, notice, with Thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

And so, whenever you pray, why not always try and remember a point of thanks?

It will help you learn to grow in thankfulness and to be overflowing with thankfulness. And so here's the how of Thanksgiving, to shout or rejoice, to worship or serve, to come before God with joyful songs and to enter his throne room through prayer, to give thanks and praise his name.

There's a fair bit there, isn't there? But that's because, like this psalmist, we're to be overflowing with thankfulness, just as we heard through that second reading.

[13 : 52] But why? Point two. Well, again, the psalmist tells us, verse three. He begins by saying, know that the Lord is God.

To help us give thanks, the psalmist says, know who our God is. Often we think only about what God has given us. But here, we're told firstly, to know who our God is, his character.

Like, know our Lord is the God. You see, in Israel's day, the issue in society was not, is there a God?

That's our issue in our society. No, their issue was, who is the true God? And the psalmist here is saying, our Lord, he is the true God.

And so, know, he's saying, know in your heads and your hearts, that we have the real deal. We have the real God. In fact, we can know with even more certainty, because Jesus has made God known to us.

[15 : 02] And the fact that our God is the true God, is worth giving thanks for, because it means we're not wasting our time following him. Are we? When I was a kid, my mom would buy us breakfast cereal, for a holiday treat, Cocoa Pops.

But she got the no frills version from Franklin's. This one on your screens. Now, some no name brands, food is fine, but they never tasted right.

And so, when she finally bought the real deal, you know, the Kellogg's one, the Kellogg's Cocoa Pops, we were so thankful, because they actually tasted like Cocoa Pops.

Well, when it comes to God, we don't have the no frills version. The one who doesn't taste right. The one who can't do anything.

No, no, we have the real deal, who is able to help us, who can keep his promises. And so, it's worth giving him thanks, isn't it?

[16 : 12] And what's more, as the true God, he made us. See the next line? It is he who made us, and we are his. Now, he made us by creating us as people, and then saving us to be his people.

In fact, he didn't just create us as people, he created everyone. That's why the psalmist said back in verse 1, that all the earth is to shout for joy to the Lord, because God created all the earth, you see.

And so, all the earth owes him our lives. Occasionally, our mothers remind kids they need to be more thankful, because the mothers gave them birth.

But how much more so, God, who enables mothers to give birth. Indeed, who enables our lungs to keep breathing. No, we need to keep giving thanks to God all our lives, because he gave us life.

Often in life, we do think we are owed things. Now, we are owed this, or we are owed that. It's our right. But we actually didn't create the world or even our lives.

[17 : 31] God did. And so, we owe him. It's interesting, actually, that the New Testament suggests not giving thanks is actually at the heart of sin.

So, in Romans, we're told that the key problem of humanity was that although they knew God existed from creation, they neither glorified God as God, nor, notice, gave thanks to him.

At the heart of sin is not letting God be God and not thanking him. Do you see how important giving thanks is? I mean, just think.

Imagine if Adam and Eve were in the garden and they were more thankful for all that they had rather than looking and focusing on what the one fruit they didn't have.

If they were more thankful to God for all they had, they wouldn't have fallen for that temptation. They would have glorified God for all he'd given them. You see, giving thanks actually helps keep us from sinning, you realise.

[18 : 39] In fact, it even helps keep us from envying and becoming bitter in life. But since God created all the earth, then every good gift is coming down from the Father from above, as it says on your screens there.

I like the beautiful day we enjoyed yesterday how nice was that day. A member of the nine o'clock service who has since moved into state, I used to come to my men's Bible study group and whenever it came time to pray, he would almost always begin with, I'd like to thank God for all the blessings I have.

Almost every single week he'd start with, I'd like to thank God for the blessings I have. Because he knew every good gift came from his Father above.

Each day of our lives is from him and so we're to thank him each day of our lives. God didn't just make us people by creating us, he also made us his people by saving us and he continues to care for us.

So the rest of verse 3 goes on to say, we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. And so he made, just as he made Israel his people by saving them from Egypt, so he has made us his people by saving us from sin's judgment.

[20 : 18] But he doesn't just save us and then leave us, no, he continues to care for us like a shepherd and we like the sheep of his pasture, his precious people.

It's been so encouraging reading the messages from so many people at the morning services from both St. John's and Holy Trinity and even from the 5pm service as well.

And a lot of those messages are talking about thanking God for this continued care, the care that he has shown over this past year in many and varied ways.

Whether it's the safe arrival of a grandchild or some sort of provision for work or health or even the fact that COVID came at a time in history when we had the technology to keep doing these services.

these are all examples of how God not only creates us and saves us but continues to care for us. And so is that not a reason to give thanks?

[21 : 22] the point is know who God is. The one who creates saves and cares and if you know that you'll have plenty of reason to give thanks.

And just to make sure the psalmist gives more in verse 5 he says for the Lord is good his love endures forever and his faithfulness continues through all generations.

Now because of time let me just focus on the first aspect God's goodness here and notice the psalmist doesn't say God does good even though that's true now he begins again with God's character God is good just like we sung earlier oh the goodness of Jesus this is who God is and so because he is good then he is incapable of doing bad which means he can only give good gifts as Jesus said on the next slide that if even sinful parents know how to give good gifts to their kids how much more a good father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him you see his goodness means he's incapable of giving bad gifts is that not a relief as Christmas approaches there's always a chance a relative will buy you a gift that they like but you not so much

I don't know if you've ever had experience with that I have but God doesn't give kind of gifts does he he's incapable of doing so of course some of his gifts might seem bad or meh at the time like allowing us to suffer things in this fallen world you know doesn't seem good at the time but when we look back on our life whether it's in this world or the world to come we will see how God used that for our good and how it was a good gift for us I remember one year getting a gift which I kind of thought meh on here it is it's before they were really popular this was about 20 years ago now it's a cheese slicer I don't know if you can see that and so what you got I got my block of bigger cheese strong and tasty or something or other anyway and you just kind of slice it across here and it makes these cheese slices these nice neat cheese slices at the time

I kind of thought meh but after as I look back and realized how good it was that was a great gifts are meh but they are always good because he's incapable of giving bad is that not then worth giving thanks for indeed for the psalmist his goodness seems to lead to his love and faithfulness you see there the Lord is good and then his love endures forever and his faithfulness continues through all generations and so when God when we don't always love him he continues to love us how good is that and when we're not always faithful to him he continues to be faithful to us again how good is that these are great things worth giving thanks for aren't they of course we see

[25 : 18] God's goodness and love especially at the cross as we read in our last bible reference on your screens there at one time we too were foolish disobedient and on it goes but notice when the goodness and loving kindness of God our saviour appeared he saved us not because of works done by us in righteousness no no according to his own mercy by the washing of regeneration and renewal by the holy spirit whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our saviour so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life here here is God's goodness and love that while we were foolish sinners he mercifully saved through his son Jesus Christ and for at the cross

God forsook his son so that he would never forsake us isn't that incredible but instead give us life eternal is that not worth thanking God for the Washington Post reported this story coming out of Afghanistan last month of a man called Muhammad and his brother who's unnamed now Muhammad was in the US when the Taliban took Kabul the capital but his family was still over there in the capital and so he's desperately trying to get his family out on one of the last flights from Kabul airport now he couldn't work it out he encouraged his friends he encouraged his wife to start with to go to the airport and try and get through the Taliban but when she came the

Taliban said no you're not allowed past because you don't have your guardian that is your husband with you and so they turned her away and so he called his brother who was in Afghanistan and so what the brother then did was decided to pretend to be her husband and so they came back to the gate and he said he was the husband and he got the family through onto the flight and so Muhammad's wife and kids got on the flight along with his brother but here's the rub for the brother to do that it meant he had to forsake his own family and leave them in Afghanistan knowing that when he got to the US he didn't have a green card and so he'd all likelihood be sent back and yet he did it in fact as Muhammad was driving to the airport the article goes on to say this on your screens they're coming face to face with his brother who had sacrificed everything to save his family he didn't know he was lost for words he said what his brother did for me

I cannot repay and when they were finally reunited at the airport on the next slide here is a picture of the scene and while they hugged his brother was taken away by US immigration because he did not have a green card the point of the story is out of goodness and love this brother forsook his family and life to save another family and give them life in the US but God has done that on an infinitely greater scale because God forsook his family so to speak his son Jesus and Jesus gave up his life to save millions of other families and us as individuals and give us life not in the US of course but life eternal imagine that

God willingly forsook his son so that he would never forsake us but instead give us life eternal and like Muhammad we can never repay that can we but is that not worth giving thanks for you see we have every reason to be overflowing with thankfulness whether by shouting or rejoicing worshipping or serving by praising in song or simply thanking in prayer we have every reason to be overflowing with thankfulness even in the world's most locked down city so let's start doing that let's pray and give thanks let's pray our gracious heavenly father through christ we come before your throne to give you thanks and praise for you are the true god who created us saved us and cares for us who is good and whose love and faithfulness endures forever father we thank you so much for who you are and what you have done for us in christ may we continue to know who you are and so continue to overflow with thankfulness in jesus name we pray amen