

Reading: Psalm 100

Theme: Giving Thanks at Harvest (and at all times!)

It is good and right to give thanks to God for all His care and provision for us as individuals, as families and as a nation. Personally I think it is good to have Harvest Thanksgiving services when we can specifically pause and deliberately give thanks to God for all the many good things that He has given to us. Psalm 100 was written with the specific aim of giving thanks - see NIV heading; other versions say "*thanksgiving*" or "*thank offering*" or "*for praise*" (AV). The word use is most often translated as "*thanksgiving*". This little Psalm is about that, but remarkably it doesn't give us the major reasons why we are to give thanks until the last verse! What it does is to give as a series of 7 instructions, commands, or imperatives, and then give us 3 reasons as to why we are to give thanks. I want to work quickly through this little psalm using those 7 commands and the 3 reasons to see what we can learn from it:

1. Seven Commands (v1-4)

These 7 commands are given to centre our attention on giving thanks, but this is not to be done grudgingly, mechanically or unthinkingly, but will involve whole hearted thankfulness to God for all He has done.

A. Universal Joy (v1) - here is a command, an instruction that says give thanks to God out loud. Translations are - make a joyful noise, to shout for joy or shout joyfully. The idea here is that of applause with the voice - not begrudgingly, but with heartfelt joy and celebration. When someone has done something remarkable, momentous and people applaud them, are glad - that is what is behind this, for it carries the idea of exuberance, of joy, of fervency. It is not, definitely not, half-hearted.

The psalmist calls on all the earth, on all lands to do this. I wonder how we have come to this meeting. I don't mean walked, or by car, but in our attitude. Are we willing and ready to make a joyful noise? (*That means we do not have to have a good singing voice!*) Are we ready to make a joyful noise or shout? Perhaps we could feel it's a bit off to think of being excited about God, but it's a bit too enthusiastic for our liking, is not the British way, or certainly not our way here in the church! Sadly many feel like that about God. While it may be fine to be excited and enthusiastic about sport, or our nation, or whatsoever, but about God...! We are to realise that God wants, expects wholehearted enthusiastic people, and also to noisily make known His praise because of their joy in and for Him.

B. Willing Service (v2a) – The word "*worship*" (NIV) is better translated "*serve*" (most versions) - it is the word used for service in labour, which involves hard work at times. We are to serve the Lord in this way, but not grudgingly, but with gladness as we are pleased and willing. We are to realise that if we are a Christian then Jesus is our Lord and it is not optional, it is not a further issue in our Christian life, but He is both our Lord and Saviour and we are to serve the Lord with gladness. To do things with gladness means we want to be involved with things and stop sitting on the side-lines, but want to get involved in a ministry of serving of some kind. There are lots of areas in church life that we can serve the Lord in, as well as serving Him in our own lives and situations, as we consciously and actively seek to tell others of Him by our lives and lips.

I know we all live busy lives and have many pressures upon us, but we are not to resent time given to serve the Lord, to work for Him and His people. We may do things, but do it in the wrong spirit, for it is to be with gladness and amazement that we can

serve the King of kings and the Lord of lords. We can do so in many ways - many of which may not be upfront, important teaching roles, but we are quietly giving the equivalent of a cup of water to another believer, a word of encouragement, or have a listening ear. Whatever we do to serve the Lord it should be with gladness.

C. Joyful Songs (v2b) - we are to go to God, into His presence with singing, shouts of joy, joyful songs. We are singers in our house, especially on car journeys. While instrumentals are nice, sing-along songs are great. Singing has such a prominent position in the Bible. The universe was created with the accompaniment of singing - angels sang as God created the material universe (Job 38:7); the birth of the Saviour was announced with the heavenly choir singing; in heaven singing is presented to us as loud and joyful as all will praise the Lord; in our lives, being filled with the Holy Spirit, is to be accompanied by Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs - both in our hearts and outwardly (Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19). Even in dark times God's people still are able to sing e.g. Paul and Barnabas in prison in Philippi. If we know the Lord God as our Saviour then we have every reason to sing, or try to sing, joyfully of our God and His glory and do so with thanksgiving.

D. Glorious Knowledge (v3) - the Psalmist encourages us to know that the Lord is God. We need to question whether we know that the Lord is our God. Do we realise and recognise that He is the Creator of all things, He is our Creator specifically? None of us are self-made people. Whether we realise it or not we are all dependent upon others and will remain so all our lives, but we are totally dependent upon God for our life - He sustains and keeps us; He designed our bodies, this world and universe. We need to recognise and know these things and that our harvest celebration

reminds us that we are dependent upon God and all He gives us. We need to realise He is an awesome God and to fear Him, for the Bible says that the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord and so we will come to know this Creator God as our own God and Saviour. When that happens then we will know we are His people and are the sheep of His pasture, with Him being our Shepherd. Psalm 23 is a lovely psalm and here, as there, we are to know this God as our God and our Shepherd. Do we? It is amazing that this knowledge can be ours, but thrilling and far better when it is experienced in a real personal relationship!

E. The Right Attitude (v4a) - this 4th verse is the central, the key verse around which the Psalm functions and revolves. The theme and its emphasis is summarised or focused upon here. Yet we can enter into heaven in prayer also – His gates and courts in their fullest sense and what an awesome privilege. It is right to come to worship and praise God; it is good and right to come to a place of worship to join with others with the same aim and reason, but we so easily could come in the wrong way, with wrong attitudes. Yet it is still worth coming even then, as it could be a time when God could meet with us; but we are ideally to have the right approach from the start and to enter place of worship with thankfulness and praise in our innermost beings and this is especially so in prayer on our own.

We are to be realists and recognise there will be times when we feel we do not have much to thank and praise God for at church or in prayer! Yet by counting our blessings we could realise that we always have something to thank and praise God for - to start with v3 will always be true if we know God as our God in the Lord Jesus. Having a heart and mind to do so, we can realise by counting our blessings, especially at harvest time, that we have a

whole host of other blessings to also come to God's house with thanksgiving and praise.

This thanking God and praising Him are further commended to us as we come with this right attitude to actively give thanks and praise Him, which in the Hebrew are separate commands, instructions for us, especially if we know this God is our God and Saviour.

F. Give Thanks (v4b) – God gives us so much and we can so easily take Him and the good things He gives us for granted. It is right to for us to thank Him for all He is and all He has truly blessed us with, even those confusing providences where our unwise desires and prayers have not been answered! We have many, many reasons to thank God and let our thanksgiving ascend to Him as sweet and fragrant perfume. This is the case over a harvest thanksgiving weekend when we focus on His bountiful care and provision for us in our land at this time. As individuals and a church we have many reasons to thank God for His provisions for us in so many areas of life.

G. Praise Him (v4c) – the Amplified version translates this, to get the fullest sense of the original words in this part of the verse as “*Be thankful and say so to Him, bless and affectionately praise His name!*” This is not to be a formal thing, but something that springs from our innermost beings and hearts for all God is, is to us, what He has done and done for us. In our harvest context we can affectionately praise His name for all His material provisions for our lives, families and land.

What are we doing? Do we have any desire or inclination to know and acknowledge Him, to be thankful and affectionately praise Him? Perhaps we need to realise that if there is a God and He can

be known, then it should be important to us to do all we can to have this incredible privilege of knowing God. At a time of thankfulness and gratitude such as harvest, as well as other times in our lives, it should cause us to consider who we are to thank and praise for all good gifts around us. When we know God as our Saviour we can rightly thank and praise Him.

2. Three Reasons (v5)

Let us briefly see in this verse the three reasons the psalmist gives as why we should thank and praise God in the ways commanded. He tells us we should do so because of:

A. His Goodness: it is a simple statement "*For the Lord is good*" yet it is a very important statement as it declares that all God is and does is good. It means all that He is and all that He does is perfect, good and right and this works out in all His dealings with all of His creation. He is kind and bountiful to all His creation, but because He is good, God has love, God shows grace, mercy and patience in all He does. This God is so good, that He sends rain and sunshine on both the ones who love Him and those who neglect, reject or ignore Him. So a large harvest or prosperity doesn't mean that God favours someone or some nation as they could be wicked and yet God in His goodness would still allow them to know good things. Perhaps with our lives, we count ourselves really lucky, charmed, fortunate, or blessed. Yet it does not automatically or necessarily mean that we are God's child, but it is of His goodness that these things come to us. The Bible tells us that God's goodness leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4 AV). It is quite incredible that people can know such goodness from God, yet they can ungratefully and thoughtlessly take such and live lives that are careless, thoughtless of the One who would give them so much. God's goodness is a reason why we should give

thanks and praise God not only at harvest time, but throughout all our lives.

B. His Love: God's love endures forever to His people and we are to realise that He is not some sort of wishy-washy grandfather figure in the sky, who nods and smiles at all and is indifferent to people's morals, lives and sins. Out of His goodness, God has revealed His righteous love in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us that God so loved the world that He sent His Son to be our Saviour, to save us from our sins and by believing on Him we can have eternal life; but not only that, we will know and experience the love of God towards us personally and that love be expressed in so many ways in our lives. When we begin to know this, we will understand that we have been loved with an everlasting love and that this love will never end. In fact we are told that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:38-39). We are to realise that human love, no matter how strong, will have its ups and downs and will one day end. It is thrilling to remember that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus; not even our death - as that will take us into His presence, where we will know His love fully and we will totally realise all we should thank and praise Him for and for setting His love upon us.

If we do not know the love of God in and through the Lord Jesus as our Saviour, then we are missing out on something so incredibly marvellous and thrilling. As Christians we should be thrilled and excited about this love of God to us in the Lord Jesus and we have every reason to praise and thank God for it, for every evidence and experience we have of it.

C. His Faithfulness: we may say of ourselves or others "*Having a bad day*" or "*Having an off day*". Thankfully God never has an

off day, or a bad day, because He never changes and He is always faithful, trustworthy, reliable. We can sing of God's faithfulness and that means He does not change, not even one tiny little bit. His truth (AV) or faithfulness endures, goes on and continues through all generations. This word translated *truth* or *faithfulness* has as its root word a word that we say at the end of prayers "Amen" - let it be so, so be it, we confirm this, it is true. God's "Amen" His being so, truth, faithfulness, stability, reliability is reliable to and throughout all generations. He is not fickle and changes His mind; He does not forget, or things slip from His mind - He is not changeable. This means His love continues and He doesn't give up on us, even when we would give up on ourselves; His goodness, His love is as secure for us as it was for the psalmist, as it was for the Apostles as it will be for our descendants. Why? Because God is faithful.

We can see the evidence of this faithfulness all throughout our lives and His care of us. Seed time and harvest are further tokens of His great faithfulness to this world and to the promise He made to Noah - *"As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease."* (Genesis 8:22).

With such a God as our God these seven commands to thank and praise Him should not be burdensome, something we are reluctant to do, but such praise and thankfulness should come from willing hearts which delight in who God is to us and in all that He's done for us, doing for us and will do for us. All this is the sweeter when we know that the Lord is God and He is our God in and through the Lord Jesus. So this harvest day evening perhaps we need to start thinking seriously about God. If we do know Him, then we have every reason to thank and praise Him every day and not just this harvest day.