

Oh Give Thanks Unto the LORD

Day of Thanksgiving – 11/28/24 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Psalm 136 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 1, “**Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever.**”

Introduction

✘ Let’s be clear, today is neither a worldwide holiday nor historically a Church holiday. And yet, all across our nation today people are thankful.

→ Fishermen are thankful for an abundant catch. Businessmen and women are thankful for year-end profits. Wives and husbands are thankful for a secure home. Children are thankful for caring parents who love them.

✘ All of these are right, good and pleasing to God. For God is the One who does so much to provide for us every day. As Martin Luther says in his explanation to the first article of the Apostles’ Creed, God “richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life.”

→ We should never make light of, or take for granted the many things that God does right now today for us as we live in this world.

I. Remember what God has done for us.

✘ However, in order to put things in their proper perspective, it is necessary for us to regularly remember what He had already done for us before we ever came into this world, and also to steadfastly believe what He will do for us after we leave this world.

✘ So, first, let’s consider what He had already done for us. The greatest event in the history of the world took place centuries before anyone in this congregation was ever born. Yet it took place for our benefit.

→ No, I am not talking about the signing of the Magna Charta, or the victory of Wellington over Napoleon at Waterloo, or the death of Julius Caesar, even though those are generally considered to be decisive elements in world history.

✘ Psalm 136 begins in verses 4-9, reminding us that God “alone does great wonders,” pointing us to remember God’s omnipotent work in creating the entire universe in just six 24-hour days as a foundational reason for us to offer our gratitude every day toward Him. He is the only reasonable explanation – yes, I said reasonable explanation for the way that the “earth” rose “above the waters”. He made and placed “the great lights” in the only place they could be so that the “sun” would “rule over the day” and “the moon and stars” would “rule over the night.”

→ Even secular scientists have to admit that there are far too many variables that exist the only way that this universe, solar system and planet could exist so that we are able to live and survive as we do, for this to be just an accident or lucky occurrence. If the earth, for example, were just the smallest amount closer or further from the sun, or rotated only slightly faster or slower, etc., we would not be here. And to believe that all of the organization throughout all of nature could just randomly come together as it has is to believe in something far more impossible than the facts that God has revealed to us in Scripture about His enduring love for us in creating and caring for us in this world.

→ Then in verses 10-12 the psalmist recounts God’s saving work in the Exodus; how He “struck down the firstborn of Egypt...” and “brought Israel out from among them...with a strong hand and an outstretched arm.” Yet neither of these is the greatest event in history.

✘ Those mind-boggling events of God’s “steadfast love” still only pointed God’s people forward to THE greatest event in all of history, which was this entire world’s own redemption. John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” That love; that sacrifice that God gave to and for us is priceless!

→ I mean, He was not obligated to provide any way of salvation for mankind. No one forced the Father to send His Son into the world. Yet He did it anyway. Why? because of His “steadfast love” for us. From the time He created the world, God knew that on this specific day in history every single one of us would meet here at this church to have a service of Thanksgiving. He also knew that, unless He sent a Savior into the world, every single one of us would deservedly be doomed to eternal condemnation.

→ So Holy Scripture is very clear, that God loved us and had mercy for us long before we were even born. He knew of our pitiful state – saturated entirely with sin and guilt. And so in His grace, at the right time, He sent us a Savior. And we remember the good news that those few shepherds “out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night” (Lk. 2:8) first received, when an angel appeared to them and said, “Fear not for behold, I bring you good news of great joy” (Lk. 2:10).

✘ Yes, with that, the redemption of the world was begun. However, it wasn’t until 33-years later that God’s saving work was finally “finished” (Jn. 19:30). For years our Savior grew up on this earth much like children still grow up today.

→ He thirsted as we thirst. He hungered as we hunger. He was tempted by Satan in every way that we are tempted. But He never once fell to sin as we so often do (Heb. 4:15). When He was cursed He did not curse back. When others made Him suffer, He never once threatened them back. Even when He was dying on the cross, what did He do? He asked, “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Lk. 23:34). He prayed this for His enemies!

✘ And as we know, God’s plan did not end when Jesus died there on the cross. No, three days later, remember what happened when the two Marys went to the tomb with ointments and spices for the body? On their way to the tomb, their primary worry was, “Who will roll away the stone for us?” (Mk. 16:3) And they soon found out that their worries were needless, just as so many of your worries and my worries are needless today, because “Christ had risen. He has risen indeed. Alleluia!”

→ On that glorious day, it had been 33 years since the angels gave that first message to the shepherds in the field. But now, instantly redemption was no longer only a plan in the mind of God. It was forever from that day an accomplished historical fact. Now redemption has been won for all humankind, so that all can be free from the power of sin, Satan, and the fear of death. Yes, this undisputed freedom that God gained for us through the saving work of His Holy Son - it was achieved for us all long before we were ever conceived or born.

✘ But that’s not all. God did not stop doing things for you and me after our redemption was gained. After all, what good is freedom, if no one tells the slaves about it, right? So God also preserved a means; an avenue; a way by which men, women, and children like you and me, who now live hundreds of years after Christ’s ministry on earth, can still know of Jesus and His work.

→ I’m talking about His giving and preserving of the Holy Scriptures. God has protected His Holy and inspired Word through every natural and unnatural catastrophe you can think of. He saw to it that the Bible survived through earthquakes, fires, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, and volcanoes for only one reason; because He loves you and me; because He wants you and me to read His life-saving and life-giving message; a message so simple that even a child can understand it.

→ “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” That message is not complicated, yet it is unfathomably profound, because unless we know of God’s love from the Bible, we can know nothing of our eternal salvation. You see, all of that, God has done for us before we were ever born! He promised and provided redemption for us. And He preserved the Bible through hundreds of years, just so that we can know today of His saving work for us!

✘ And He was still not done! He wanted even more grace to pour out upon us. So, He promised to send us His Holy Spirit so that, through the Spirit’s work, each one of us would realize the importance of the Bible’s message, and through His gift of faith, we would then believe without any doubt that it is God’s perfectly relevant and meaningful message for us, right here; right now.

→ Without the Holy Spirit’s work friends, you and I would care less or not at all for the truths contained in Holy Scripture. Why? because we’re sinners; because left by ourselves, we would want nothing to do with God and instead we’d be perfectly content to lead our lives of sin. That’s our earthly nature from birth; wanting nothing to do with God and His righteousness. Just like darkness has nothing to do with light, neither would we have anything to do with God if it weren’t for the work of the Holy Spirit.

→ So you see how much God loves us; how much He has done for us even before we were born? How can we ever begin to adequately thank Him for these great blessings?

II. Believe what God will do for us.

✘ God did not stop with preparing great blessings for us before we came into the world. Right now, at this very moment friends, He has prepared even greater things in the future for us, whenever it is that we leave this world.

→ That’s right, our life with Him in heaven will be like nothing we have ever known or seen before. On that great day, at the end of the world, God promises in His Word that Satan, and all of his evil angels will be cast into Hell forever. No longer will you and I even be tempted to think, say, or do anything against our loving Father’s perfect will.

✘ So many people over the centuries have spent far too much time trying to figure out exactly what heaven will be like. Will it be a place up in the sky? Will it be right here on a re-created earth? Will it be like a palace with golden streets and pearly gates? We can spend so much time dwelling on all of those questions. But that is not how God wants us to spend our time in this life.

→ This much though, we know for sure: Listen to God’s word from Revelation 21:3–4, “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.’” As long as I know that folks, heaven is absolutely the place where I want to be.

✘ Yes, the very same Jesus that God the Father sent us in His love; the One who lived, and died; who rose again so that we might have eternal life, that’s the Lord we will see then and there in the flesh; face to face. He is the same Lord who will wipe away all of our tears; the same Lord who, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, will take care of us as our loving Shepherd; as our almighty King forever and ever!

Conclusion

✘ Most of us, in some way today, appreciate how God blesses and provides for us every day of our lives. We are thankful that He supplies us with so many temporal blessings; food, drink,

house, clothing, money, government, good weather, peace, health, friends, and family, and I am sure we could add to that list and make it so much longer.

→ It's good for us to remember all of these as expressions and evidence of "His steadfast love" that "endures forever." And it's good to thank Him today and every day for them.

- ⊗ Yet, as the psalmist reminds us, we must never let these temporal blessings, overshadow the far greater spiritual blessings that God has given us in Jesus Christ. As verses 23-24 say, He "remembered us in our low estate;" in the deepest depths of our sin and He "rescued us from our foes"; those of Satan and death itself. It is only through Jesus that you and I are fully forgiven; that we have received eternal life. And there can be no greater gift than that undeserved reward of eternity in heaven.
 - ⊗ That is why on this Thanksgiving Day, it is so important for us not only to remember our blessings, but that we keep those blessings in the proper perspective – as free gifts from Christ alone. He must be the first and the greatest reason for us to give thanks today and every day. Because He's the one who won our salvation long before we came into this world, and He's the one, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, who has heaven waiting for us when we leave this world.
- "Oh give thanks to the LORD for He is good, and His steadfast love endures forever." Amen.