

Thanksgiving 2019

By: Rev. Dr. Cecil Clements

Dated: 13.10.2019

Scripture: Psalm 103

I'd like to read a couple of verses from the 103rd psalm, and not so much as preach through it, but use it as a stepping stone into something else that I want to talk to you about. But first, let's look at Thanksgiving Sunday through the eyes of the psalmist.

*Bless the Lord, O my soul,
And all that is within me, bless His holy name.
Bless the Lord, O my soul,
And forget none of His benefits;
Who pardons all your iniquities,
Who heals all your diseases;
Who redeems your life from the pit?
Who crowns you with loving kindness and compassion;
Who satisfies your years with good things,
So that your youth is renewed like the eagle.*

"All that is within me," the psalmist says, "Call upon your whole being and bless the Lord for all His benefits, for the pardon that He has given for our iniquities, for the healing that He has brought to the things that have confronted us. How He has redeemed our life from the pit and how He has crowned us with loving kindness and compassion, and for all these things, bless the Lord, O my soul. Everything within me, bless His name."

Every year as I look at what I want to say, one paragraph seems to come out in my mind in which I always say that I am so thankful for a day like this, where we can come together and just be thankful – just say, "Lord, today I don't need anything. I just want to say how good it has been to trust in you and to be with you."

I was reminded of a story that Rich Stevenson, one of the founders of the Great Commission Fellowship said. It was about a father who came home after work and his son came in and saw his dad sitting there. He said, "Hey dad, I'd like to go out to the mall. I need some money. Would you give me some?" His father pulled out his wallet and gave him some money. A little while later, his daughter waltzed into the room and she said, "Hey dad, I'm going out with my friends. Can I have the car?" And so he handed over the keys to the car. A little later, his five-year-old daughter walked in and he looked at her and said, "And what do you want?" and she replied, "Nothing! I just came to sit on your lap." And sometimes, that's the best thing to do – to just say, "Lord, I don't want anything from You. You've given me plenty. I just want to crawl into your lap and be there, and let You know how much You are loved. I want to thank You and just snuggle."

*Bless the Lord, O my soul,
And all that is within me, bless His holy name.*

How do we do that? We look at all these things that adorn this altar. It's harvest! That's what we are celebrating – harvest time. These are like bringing in the first fruits of our labors, as the children of Israel did. Yet, this tradition has come to us from the church in England actually. In Methodism, there are two streams that came into India: a stream from the U.S. and the one from England. It's

the English Wesleyan Methodist actually (An example of the Wesleyan Methodist church is the church in Colaba) where a particular pastor one day decided that he would have a Sunday where he invited people to come and be thankful. This became very popular and a particular Sunday was set aside for just thanksgiving and for being thankful. And they would sing songs like: 'We plough the fields and scatter', 'Come ye thankful people, come', 'All things bright and beautiful'. And we sang some of these at the first service, along with others from German traditions that were translated. So, this became an annual festival where people would come together. They would even bring food and share it with each other and enjoy a Sunday where they could say, "Lord, we just want to thank you."

I was really moved to ask ourselves the question: What more? How do we respond to the Lord on a Sunday that we say is Thanksgiving Sunday? So, I thought I would pull out Scriptures and see what they would inform us about giving thanks.

1 Thessalonians 5:18

No matter what happens, always be thankful for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.

We break up that verse ... 'no matter what is going on in your life' – I know that some of you are going through difficult times; some of you have lost loved ones in this year and life hasn't been easy. Some of you may have lost a job; some of you may be in financial trouble, not able to make two ends meet. Or maybe you're struggling with a broken relationship, or maybe you're in debt. Things are hard. And yet, if we look at what's going on in our lives through the grip of this particular passage of Scripture, then we must say that no matter what is going on in our life, even though we are going through this situation, we must be thankful.

So, we are invited all the time to be thankful, whatever the situation. Our attitude of thankfulness is not based on our circumstances and our situations. They are not. I would think that they are based on the fact that we are children of the most high God. And He watches over us. These are times when we can know for certain that, even if we are in free fall, He will not let us hit the ground. He cares for us. He will take us through that even though we've not had a job maybe for a while, there's still food on the table; because your heavenly Father cares.

So as we look at our lives – maybe the situations and circumstances that you are going through have come back and threatened to steal that peace and equilibrium that you have after the wonderful time of worship – I'd like to invite you to get connected once again with the Lord, and say to Him, "Lord, even in this situation, I'm going to give you thanks."

Hebrews 12:28

Since we are receiving a kingdom that is unshakable, let us be thankful and please God by worshipping Him with holy fear and awe.

Two thoughts here:

We have received a kingdom that is an unshakeable kingdom. When we go through situations in life and when the rug gets pulled out from under our feet, then we are on shaky ground. And yet, we are promised a kingdom that is unshakeable. Whatever happens to you in that kingdom, the kingdom of God, God is still in control, and you will not be moved. God is completely in charge of what is going on in your life.

Jesus talked about the wise man and the foolish man in Matthew's gospel. The foolish man built his house upon the sand, the wise man built his house upon the rock. When the rains came, the house upon the sand fell flat while the house on the rock stood firm. And that's the firmness that comes to

us, those of us who call ourselves sons and daughters of the most high God. Our foundation is on Jesus – the unshakeable foundation. He is the one who will take us through times when adversity comes, when the winds of oppression come, when hardships come. At a time like that, we are on solid ground. We are in a place of an unshakeable kingdom.

Then He goes on to say, “Be thankful and please God by worshipping Him with holy fear and awe.” So, as we prepare our hearts to be thankful, we are told that we need to worship Him, worship Him in two ways – from the Scripture, and worship Him with holy fear and awe. Somebody said that 365 times in the Bible, it says, “Do not fear.” This is not the fear we are talking about. That is the fear when God says to us not to be fearful of the things that are going on around you. But we still have a holy fear of an awesome God.

We must understand that the things that He has said in His word will come to be. There will be a time when He will come again; it will be a time of judgment and everyone will be judged. That’s a fearful thing – to stand before a living God. There will be a time when heaven and hell will be decided about people. That’s a fearful thing. So, there are things that we need to be aware of. At no point can we be casual about the things of God. This brings us to ‘awe’. We must never get so casual with Him that we treat Him flippantly.

A couple of years back I wrote an article and entitled it: ‘Have We Lost the Awe?’ have we lost the reverence that we ought to have for a holy God? Have we got so used to treating Him as a friend, that we forget that He is the Creator? How do we treat Him when we talk to Him, when we worship Him? Do we give Him that space when we walk into this sanctuary? Are we able to say, “Lord, I am not going to even bother with my cell phone. I’m going to let you handle that. I’m going to be completely focused on you.” That’s what worship calls for. When we take a call in the midst of worship or a service, what we are actually saying is, “Lord, excuse me. I’ll be back. I need to take care of something. I’ll come back and pick up with you.”

Awe! Respect for Him! When we come with thanksgiving in our hearts, that must be our attitude of worship – to be able to come with respect and awe.

Isaiah 12:4-5 *In that wonderful day you will sing:
“Thank the Lord! Praise His name!
Tell the nations what He has done.
Let them know how mighty He is!
Sing to the Lord, for He has done wonderful things.
Make known His praise around the world.”*

Thank Him and praise Him; tell the nations what He has done. Let them know how mighty He is and the wonderful things that He has done for you. Make known His praise around the world.

But I think, to even begin to make His praise known around the world we need to know about the wonderful things He has done. And I wonder whether we have taken the time to note those things, to remember. time and time again, in the Old Testament, we see that God kept telling the children of Israel: Remember! Remember! Don’t forget the things that I have done for you. Maybe a good exercise to do today when you go home, is to take a piece of paper and a pen and write down the wonderful things that God has done through the year or in previous years. Put them down and then share it with people around.

There is a song that says: "Count your blessings; name them one by one. And it will surprise you what the Lord has done." When we intentionally go down that list, we are going to say, "Wow! I'd forgotten that had happened!"

When I was teaching a class last month, I shared with them a specific part of our journey back to India in 1996. It was a walk of faith. As we were landing into Mumbai, I was concerned (I don't want to say fearful) because we had just uprooted our three children, packed our bags and got on the flight, without knowing what we were going to do. Nothing was clear! Half an hour before the flight was due to land, the pilot said, "Ladies and gentlemen, we've begun our descent into Mumbai." I remember putting my head down on the seat in front of me and praying. I said, "Lord, what's going to happen? Are You in control?" As I closed my eyes, God gave me a picture – a picture of Mumbai with lights shining all over the city. I asked the Lord, "Is this the church, the churches in Mumbai?" And He said, "No, it's the church dispersed in Mumbai. These are church folk living out their lives as Christians, Monday through Saturday, in their office spaces." That's the picture – Monday to Saturday, shining for Him.

I've never forgotten that picture. It's been an integral part of everything that we've done at CAP; it's part of our DNA here at CAP, to be intentional about the marketplace. I shared this with the students and, at the end of the lecture, one of the ladies came to me and said, "Have you written this down?" When I said no, she asked me to write it down and give it to her. I agreed but asked her why. She said, "I want to put this down in what I am writing. It is so powerful." I thought: This is something that is very close to my heart, but I'd never thought about it in terms of changing or touching anybody. Yet she seemed so touched by the whole story. We need to share with the nations what God has done in our lives; to get online and write to somebody in another part of the world and say, "Look what the Lord has done!"

We sing this song with such gusto. but does it stay only with us, or are we able to sing that out and say, "Hey, I want to tell you in England, the United States, the Netherlands, people of the world; look what the Lord has done!"

Then in the midst of his congregation, psalm 35:18 says: *Then I will thank you in front of the great assembly, I will praise you before all the people.*

Intentionally, we have the 'grateful wall of CAP'. I wonder whether today would be a good day for you to just go and write something there, not just 'Thank You, Lord.' That doesn't do anything for anybody. I'm not diminishing what it could be for the Lord. But in terms of the community, I want you to say why you are thankful. Then it inspires and encourages other people. You need not write your name if you don't want to. But say, "God helped me in this way," and write the way that He did. Somebody else may read it and say, "I am in that same predicament, and I can trust this God." The Grateful Wall. I dream that after the service at CAP, we gather around and share with each other what God did in the week gone by. Maybe today, as we gather around and celebrate Thanksgiving, we can have stories to share with each other, all that God has done in our lives.

Some of you may know that I've been captivated by this particular song this week. I've written about it, posted that song on Facebook as well. But the line that got my attention was "What shall I render unto Jehovah for He has done so very much for me." I kept thinking – that is the question for us on Thanksgiving. We are not asking Him for anything, but maybe there is something we can give Him. What can I render to Him as He has done so very much for me?

Paul Brand has done wonderful work with the leprosy missions in India. He talks about a time when he went back to England for his studies, and he got a letter informing him that his father had passed

away. A while later, he received a letter that his father had mailed to him via sea mail, and that's why it was so delayed. It read: "God means us to delight in His world. It isn't necessary to know botany or zoology or biology in order to enjoy the manifold life of nature. Just observe, and remember, and compare. And be always looking to God with thankfulness and worship for having placed you in such a delightful corner of the universe as the planet Earth." Isn't that beautiful? His dad saying: If you want to be thankful, just remember that God has placed you in such a delightful place, like earth.

So, what do we render unto Him, church? What can we bring to Him? Our lives could be one thing, if we haven't already done. If He doesn't have our lives, maybe it's a good time to come to Him and say, "Lord, I have never given You my life. I'd like to do that today." Or maybe there are parts of your life that you haven't given to Him, held on to some areas of your life. Maybe today would be a good day to give Him that, to completely take charge. Or resources, things that He has given you that you have held closely to yourself? Your worship? Does He have your complete unadulterated worship? Do you give Him that each time you go before Him? Do you give Him your full attention? Gifts that He has given you – do you bless others by sharing it, your talents, with your friends? Does He have your love?

Remember what Jesus asked Peter: "Do you love me? I'm not interested in anything else, Peter. I'm not interested in anything else, Peter, the most important thing that you can answer is do you love me, because if I do that, then we can work together. Or his devotion? Are you devoted to Him? Or maybe it is praise and grateful thanks.

What can I render unto Jehovah for He has done so very much for me?

Will you bow your heads with me and would you allow the Spirit of God to probe and show you what kind of rendering we can give to Him today? And as He shows you, will you be moved to give it to Him to yield control?

Lord, accept our lives, our resources, our worship, our gifts, our talents, our love, our devotion to you, our praise and our grateful thanks. For you are such a good God, a faithful God and one who deserves all the glory. Lord, today we just want to say, "Thank you". But along with it, Lord, would you seal those things that we have given you individually as a congregation, and we pray Master, that those who begin to, flourish under your hand and under your nourishing care. In Jesus' precious name we pray. Amen.