

Harvest Festival
NOVEMBER 17, 2024
"Oh, Give Thanks Unto The Lord"
Psalm 136:1

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Will you pray with me? May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer.

Amen

The text for our sermon today is Psalm 136:1-3, which I would like to read to you, "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. Give thanks to the God of gods, for his steadfast love endures forever. Give thanks to the Lord of lords, for his steadfast love endures forever;" So far our text.

A Week from this coming Thursday, people all across our nation will be giving thanks, mostly thankful to have the day off. However, the farmers are happy for the productive year. The heavy-duty truck manufacturers are happy for a long back-order page. College students will be happy to be out of school. Children are happy for all the good food and the opportunity to play with their cousins. We all should be happy we were born in America.

All of these are right and good. God does much to provide for us every day. As Luther says in his explanation to the First Article, God "richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life."We should never belittle the many things God does for us every day.

However, in order to put things in their proper perspective it is necessary that we also remember what HE had already done for us before we ever came into this world, and what HE will do for us after we leave. First, let us consider what HE has

already done for us.

The greatest event in the history of the world took place long before anyone in this congregation was ever born. AND, it took place for our benefit. 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 these events are generally considered to be decisive in world history. The greatest of all the events in the world was the death and resurrection of God's very own Son, paying the whole world's debt of sin.

"For God so loved the world that HE gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). That love, and that sacrifice which he gave for us is priceless.

God was not obligated to provide a way of salvation for mankind. No one forced Him to send His Son into the world. But HE did it because HE loved us. From the beginning of the

world, HE knew that unless HE sent a Savior into the world, every single one of us would be doomed to eternal condemnation. So, the Scriptures tell us HE simply felt sorry for us even before we were born. He took pity on us. Then, in His grace, at the right time, HE sent a Savior for us. And, of course, we remember how a few shepherds were the first to receive the good news, when an angel appeared to them and said, "Fear not! For behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy."

Thus the redemption of the world had begun. However, it was to be 33 years before this work was completed. Our Lord grew up on this earth much like children grow up today. He got thirsty like we do. He got hungry like we do. He got tired and slept like we do. He was tempted by Satan in every way that we are tempted. But he never once fell to sin as we so often do. When he was cursed, he did not curse back. When others made him suffer, he did not threaten retaliation. Even

when he was dying on the cross, he asked forgiveness for his enemies.

God's plan did not end with the death of Christ, because three days later, God issued a guarantee of our forgiveness by raising His Perfect Sacrifice to life again. Likewise, we will be raised to a new life when the sinless Lamb of God returns.

It was 33 years after the angels gave that first message to the shepherds in the field, when redemption changed from a plan in God's mind into an accomplished historical fact.

Redemption has now been won for all people, so that all may be free from the power of that UN-holy trinity -- sin, death and the devil. This freedom which our gracious God gained for us through the suffering and death of His Holy Son, was achieved for us all long before we were ever born.

However, God did not stop doing things for us after gaining our freedom. (What good is freedom, if no one tells the slaves about it?) God also preserved a means whereby men, women,

and children like you and me, who live hundreds of years after Christ's earthly ministry, might know of Christ and His work.

I'm talking about the preservation of the Holy Scriptures. God has preserved his Word through every natural, and unnatural catastrophe you can think of. God has seen to it that the Bible has survived through earthquakes, fires, hurricanes, floods, the devastation of the Crusades, because He loves you and me and HE wants US to read this 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 simple, and yet so profound. Because unless we know of God's love from the Bible, we would know nothing of salvation. Look at all He has done for us before we were even born! He provided forgiveness of sins for us AND preserved His written Word through hundreds of years so that we might know of HIS great and loving action for us.

But, His grace did not stop there. He also promised to send

His Holy Spirit so that through the Spirit's work, each of us would realize the importance of His Word and accept it as being a message that is relevant and meaningful to us.

Without the work of the Holy Spirit, you and I would have little care for the contents of Scripture-- why? Because we are sinners, and left by ourselves, we would want nothing to do with God. We would prefer to lead a life of sin rather than to know about God and His righteousness. Just as darkness has nothing to do with light, neither would we have anything to do with God if it were not for the work of the Holy Spirit.

God did not stop with preparing great blessings for us before we came into the world. Right now, at this very moment, He has prepared even greater things for us when we leave this world. Our life with him in heaven will be like nothing we've ever known before. On that great day, at the end of the world, Satan, and all his evil angels will be cast into hell forever. No more will you and I ever be tempted to think, say,

or do anything contrary to the will of our loving heavenly Father.

Many people have spent 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 earth? Will it be like a palace with golden streets and pearly gates? You could spend much time dwelling on those questions. But, this we know for sure. It is written in John's Revelation: "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'" As long as we know that, heaven is certainly a place where we want to be.

The same Jesus, who lived, and died, and rose again so that we might have eternal life, is the same Lord we will see, then in the flesh, face to face. He is the same Lord who will wipe away all our tears. HE is the same Lord, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit will take care of us and reign forever and ever.

Many of us appreciate what God does for us every day of our lives, because He has surely supplied us with many temporal blessings; food, drink, house, clothing, money, good government, good weather, peace, health, friends, and family, and I am sure we could add to the list making it longer and longer.

It is certainly good and right that we remember all these are God's gifts, that all these things still belong to God, that we are merely caretakers and users of His great gifts, -- that we then thank Him for allowing us to be stewards of His assets. Yet, we must never let these temporal blessings, however

great they may be, predominate over the spiritual blessings which God has given us through Jesus Christ. Because it is only through Christ that we receive the singularly most important gift of all -- eternal life in heaven.

That is why, in this coming Thanksgiving week, it is important that we not only remember our blessings, but that we also keep them in the proper perspective by putting Christ first. After all, HE is the one who has won our salvation for us. He has given us something we could never win or earn or deserve on our own. It was totally out of our own reach. Christ is the one who is making sure heaven is waiting for us when we leave this world.

"Oh give thanks unto the Lord for He is good and His mercy endures forever."

Amen.

Now may the peace of God which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior.

Amen