

NOTHING BUT PRAISE TO GOD**Psalm 103**

Intro: I've been pondering what Thanksgiving Day of 1963 was like. As it does this year, it fell on Thursday, November 28. But is a significant day because just 6 days previously President John F. Kennedy had been assassinated and the days in between had been filled with more tragedy and lots of national grief. Even though I was just six years old I can vividly recall those sad days, so it's interesting that I cannot remember how my family celebrated the national holiday. I would hope that, even with such tragic distractions, we were thankful anyway.

Abraham Lincoln made a proclamation on October 3, 1863 – practically one hundred years before the Kennedy assassination – setting aside a day of Thanksgiving in November. Now if you are any kind of historian at all, you will know that October 1863 was practically the mid-point of the horrible Civil War. In his proclamation Lincoln he acknowledged “*a civil war of unequalled magnitude and severity*” but also that harvests had continued, industry had flourished, and diversions from outside interests (like aggressive foreign nations) had not materialized. He attributed this all to God's blessing and with that he proclaims:

It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently, and gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and one voice by the whole American people. I do, therefore, invite my fellow-citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next as a Day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the heavens. And I recommend to them that, while offering up the ascriptions justly due to Him for such singular deliverances and blessings, they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to His tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners, or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty hand to heal the wounds of the nation, and to restore it, as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes, to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility, and union.

In the midst of a huge national tragedy – Mr. Lincoln was reminding his fellow citizens that they need to be thankful anyway.

We have had an eventful year full of joy and sorrow and God has been faithful through it all. No matter what kind of year we have had, we need to be thankful anyway. In fact, it's good for us to have nothing but praise to God – because he is worthy of it.

In the passage from Luke 7 that Chris read earlier, a Pharisee named Simon had invited Jesus to dine in his home. Now, we don't know what his motivations were, whether it was curiosity, or a sincere desire to learn, or a chance to catch Jesus in a theological trap, regardless, Simon was watching Jesus. So it must have been extremely tantalizing to him when a sinful woman came and washed Jesus's feet with her tears of gratitude and love, dried them with her hair, and then anointed them with expensive lotion. His thoughts almost showed up in a text bubble above his head as he savored the delight he would take in sharing it with his Pharisee friends: “Well I never! If he knew what and who this woman is he would not have allowed her to do it. This just proves that, even though people think he's a prophet, he has no idea what he's doing!”

The truth was Jesus really DID see her for what she was, and he loved her anyway, and she knew that love. And so she loved him, and she lavished her thanksgiving upon him, and he looked at her and said “Your sins are forgiven.”

You see, thanksgiving brings forgiveness. Donald Miller writes of this woman, “*If one knows the depth of his own sin and the greatness of God's forgiveness, he cannot but love as this woman did as she washed Jesus's feet with her hair.*” And when you have that kind of forgiveness, love is the result. Miller continues, “*Love is the proof of the reception of forgiveness, and the more a person is forgiven, the more he will love.*”

This brings a heart of praise and thanksgiving. Regardless of our circumstances – we have a heart of praise. So, if the tears in our eyes are from joy or grief, we need to have nothing but praise to God.

The Psalmist sings,

*Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and all that is within me,
bless his holy name!
Bless the Lord, O my soul,*

*and forget not all his benefits,
 who forgives all your iniquity,
 who heals all your diseases,
 who redeems your life from the pit,
 who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
 who satisfies you with good
 so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*

Psalm 103:1-5 (ESV)

He is showing us that . . .

Praise is Personal

- Bless the Lord **my** soul and ALL that is within **me** . . . If everyone else is silent, I will still bless the Lord. For the believer it is a natural response to a God who has given everything. Arnold Rhodes says “*This almost calls upon his whole being to its deepest recesses to praise God with gratitude.*” All I have is all I give and God gets all our praise.
- This week Kathy and I sat down because we needed to select her benefits from Charles River. This meant we had to select the least painful medical plan – the one that would provide care as we needed it but would not drain us dry paying for it. But the Psalmist points out that the benefits that come the Lord *satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's* (v. 5). Just look at those benefits. John Durham calls them “*a wondrous catalog of goodnesses and sufficient to justify and endless praise.*”:
 - Forgiveness for our iniquities (v. 3). This is what the sinful woman had experienced. *Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much.* Luke 7:47 and then he turned to her and said to her, “*Your sins are forgiven.*” Luke 7:48. Words of life for a formerly hopeless soul.
 - Healing of all our diseases. The beauty of God’s healing is that it always is the best. The ultimate healing just might the very presence of God – we can’t lose.
 - Redemption from the pit. Once again – this is what the sinful woman in our Luke text experienced. It was the new life Zacchaeus enjoyed when Jesus proclaimed he came to *seek and to save the lost* (Luke 19:10) It’s what anyone of us experiences when we turn our lives over to Jesus.
 - Steadfast love and mercy. It’s a relentless love that fights through our resistance. It is, in the words of the hymn writer, the love that will not let us go.
 - The renewal of life with wings like an eagle’s. Remember,
 - . . . *they who wait for the Lord
 shall renew their strength;
 they shall mount up with wings like eagles;
 they shall run and not be weary;
 they shall walk and not faint.* Isaiah 40:31 IT’S A PROMISE.
- Bless the Lord with nothing but praise. Listen,
 - The Lord works righteousness
 and justice for all who are oppressed.
 He made known his ways to Moses,
 his acts to the people of Israel.
 The Lord is merciful and gracious,
 slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
 He will not always chide,
 nor will he keep his anger forever.
 He does not deal with us according to our sins,
 nor repay us according to our iniquities.
 For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
 so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
 as far as the east is from the west,*

*so far does he remove our transgressions from us.
As a father shows compassion to his children,
so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.
For he knows our frame;
he remembers that we are dust.* Psalm 103:6-14

The Psalmist is telling us . . .

Praise is Universal

- The Lord works righteousness and justice for ALL who are oppressed. God's plan is that none should perish (2 Peter 3:9). God is near to the brokenhearted (Psalm 34:18). God advocates for the alien, the fatherless, and the widow (Jeremiah 22:3).
- The Lord is merciful and gracious – to all who come to him. (Revelation 22:17).
- God is slow to anger – I mean, think about it, he's infinitely patient!
- We deserve death – and he offers life – eternal life.
- As high as the heavens is his love for all humanity and for those who fear him. Our sins are taken as far as the east is from the west. Is there any wonder why we dwell on the sin he has already so forgiven? Think about it.
- He is a compassionate father who gathers his children – he knows us (he knows our frame) and we are no more than dirt – but he redeems us to the highest heaven.
- This is the promise for all who call on his holy name and bring him nothing but praise.

Listen,

*As for man, his days are like grass;
he flourishes like a flower of the field;
for the wind passes over it, and it is gone,
and its place knows it no more.
But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him,
and his righteousness to children's children,
to those who keep his covenant
and remember to do his commandments.
The Lord has established his throne in the heavens,
and his kingdom rules over all.* Psalm 103:15-19

- We see that . . .

Praise is Generational

- We are like grass – here today – dried up and gone tomorrow. But where are we gone to? We were remembering the other night that Fred Holland often said of ministry that the pay wasn't good, but the benefits are out of this world. Yes, this world is not our home and we're just a passin' through.
- We have this promise, . . . *the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him* Psalm 103:17. The writer of Lamentations tells us, *The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.* Lamentations 3:22-23. And here's the beauty, it passes on – *to children's children* – we have a legacy – so keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments.
- God is on his throne – give him nothing but praise.
- And finally this . . .

*Bless the Lord, O you his angels,
you mighty ones who do his word,
obeying the voice of his word!
Bless the Lord, all his hosts,
his ministers, who do his will!
Bless the Lord, all his works,
in all places of his dominion.
Bless the Lord, O my soul!* Psalm 103:20-22

Praise is Eternal

- Handel ended his famous Hallelujah chorus with:

*And He shall reign for ever and ever, for ever and ever.
King of kings! and Lord of lords!
King of kings! and Lord of lords!
And He shall reign for ever and ever,
King of kings! and Lord of lords!
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
Hallelujah!*

- Nothing but praise to God is what we will do for eternity – not just on Thanksgiving Day or when we are feeling particularly happy or joyful. Praise and thanksgiving is an eternal attitude.

Conclusion: As I close listen and soak in these instructions to praise:

*Praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord from the heavens;
praise him in the heights!
Praise him, all his angels;
praise him, all his hosts!
Praise him, sun and moon,
praise him, all you shining stars!
Praise him, you highest heavens,
and you waters above the heavens!
Let them praise the name of the Lord!
For he commanded and they were created.
And he established them forever and ever;
he gave a decree, and it shall not pass away.
Praise the Lord from the earth,
you great sea creatures and all deeps,
fire and hail, snow and mist,
stormy wind fulfilling his word!
Mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars!
Beasts and all livestock,
creeping things and flying birds!
Kings of the earth and all peoples,
princes and all rulers of the earth!
Young men and maidens together,
old men and children!
Let them praise the name of the Lord,
for his name alone is exalted;
his majesty is above earth and heaven.
He has raised up a horn for his people,
praise for all his saints,
for the people of Israel who are near to him.
Praise the Lord! Psalm 148 (ESV)*

Amen.