

“O Give Thanks unto the LORD”

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unto the LORD; for
he is good: for his
mercy endureth
for ever.”*

—Psalm 136:1

WHEN DAVID OFFICIALLY became king over Israel, his first executive act was to bring the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem. The ark had been separated from the Tabernacle for seventy years. This space of time covered all of King Saul's reign and Samuel's service as a judge in Israel.

The return of the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem from Abinadab's house in Baalah of Judah (also known as Kirjath-jearim) represented the return of God's favor to Israel and the return of his presence among them after a long absence. The joy of the occasion was manifest in the magnificent procession of thirty thousand men with music and song. The procession climax came when the ark reached its destination and David sang his song of thanksgiving to God. The song began with these sentiments: “Give thanks unto the LORD, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the people.” It concludes with the same sentiments: “O give

thanks unto the LORD; for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever.”—I Chron. 16:8-34

This last expression was typical of David’s feelings toward his Creator. In the Book of Psalms it is found in several places. The 106th, 107th, 118th, and 136th Psalms open with these identical words. Although the *King James Version* uses beautiful phraseology in describing the great God of all the universe—“For he is good, for his mercy endureth forever”—some of the force of David’s description of God is lost in the translation. The *Revised Version* says, “O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever.” The *Contemporary English Version* in a similar way says, “Praise the LORD because he is good to us, and his love never fails.”

It is particularly noteworthy that this last portion of David’s expression of love and appreciation for God becomes a refrain that is repeated over and over in the 136th Psalm as David relates the great and wonderful deeds of God. He concludes with thanks again when he mentions last of all, “Who giveth food to all flesh, for his steadfast [eternal] love endures forever.”—vs. 25

Those who have been privileged to know God in this present day should, like David, appreciate the goodness of God more and more. We should call to mind daily how he “loadeth us with benefits,” and give thanks. We should pause each day to think of God’s great deeds. Our wise, loving, and kind Father in heaven has thought of us in preparing this earth for habitation. The temperature is just right. The pressure doesn’t vary more than a fraction of an atmosphere. Water, food, and clothing are available

for most of mankind. It is sad to say, however, that the great majority of mankind does not give a second thought to God, much less thank him for all of these benefits.

People today seem to have lost that disposition or attitude which was present in the pilgrim fathers who came to this land many years ago. The pilgrims had to eke out an existence from a hard and rocky soil, but they succeeded. With much effort and professed faith in God, they brought forth a rich harvest. The most beautiful part of this story, which we rejoice to recall, is that they remembered God, accounting him as being responsible for these blessings, and setting aside a special day of thanksgiving to God.

The holiday which is observed in this nation this month is a most remarkable and a most wonderful holiday. It, at least in a small way, stirs people to remembering that there is a God and to have reverence toward him. Yet, this remembrance of God is waning. Since the first celebrations of Thanksgiving in this country by the pilgrim fathers, many of our government leaders and presidents have made special Thanksgiving Day proclamations. We note these specific instances. In 1676, one hundred years prior to our nation's independence, the first official governmental proclamation of Thanksgiving was made by the governing council of Charlestown, Massachusetts. The proclamation was the equivalent of about a page and a half of this magazine, and contained 21 direct or indirect references to God. It also concluded with a quotation of the entire 96th Psalm.

Over one hundred years later, in 1789, President George Washington gave the first presidential proclamation of a day of Thanksgiving. It was similar in length to the one given in 1676, and contained 12 references to God. President Abraham Lincoln likewise issued a similar-length proclamation in 1863, containing 7 references to God. Last year, President Barak Obama's 2011 Thanksgiving Day proclamation, also of similar length, made only 1 reference to God.

Thus it is not surprising to us when we observe that Thanksgiving has become a day of feasting, and most people think of food more than of God on that day. They forget that the day was designed to remind people in this nation of their wise, loving, just, and powerful Creator, and to give him thanks. The question could be asked, "Why are people in this country not like our pilgrim fathers, having the spirit of thankfulness?" One answer might be that the problems and perplexities, suffering, sickness, pain and death—which affects everyone—overshadows the people's thoughts of God's goodness. Another answer might be that most people are selfishly engrossed in their own pursuits, or that the great Adversary of God, Satan, has blinded the minds of men. Yet another answer may be that they are imperfect and forget so easily, failing to exercise their reasoning powers with regard to God's goodness.

However, lest we expect too much of mankind today and be condemning rather than understanding, let us analyze an incident that took place during our Lord Jesus' ministry on earth. The incident has a forceful lesson on the "natural" tendency for

people to forget to be thankful because of sin, selfishness, and the influence of the Adversary. The incident is recorded in Luke 17:11-19 and reads as follows: "It came to pass, as he [Jesus] went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off: And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, And fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole."

It is amazing that only one leper had enough gratitude and thoughtfulness to return to Jesus and to give him thanks when all ten of them found themselves healed of their leprosy. We should not conclude that the other nine lepers did not have faith. Rather, they lacked thoughtfulness, appreciation, and gratitude.

All ten lepers had faith because they did as Jesus bid them, and were on their way to the priests in an unclean condition, expecting a miracle to happen. Indeed, a miracle did happen. As they went, they were cleansed. In the Mosaic Law, if a leper was healed of his disease, the priests of Israel had to approve and verify his cure before he could be reinstated

into society. Specific rituals had to be performed before this was possible, as recorded in Leviticus, chapter 14. The fact that these lepers went to see the priests (before their leprosy was healed while they traveled) means that they had faith. Only one, however, had gratitude; and “He was a Samaritan,” Luke said, to the shame of Israel.

When Jesus began his ministry, he spoke to the people of Nazareth, “Many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus [Elisha] the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian.” (Luke 4:27) Jesus was implying that he would not be accepted in his own country, by his own people, and that because of this, God would have to go outside of the nation of Israel to select a “people for his name.” The cleansing of Naaman and the cleansing of the Samaritan has significance. Both were outside of Israel’s circle of favor, and both were extremely grateful for their cleansing.

There are many lessons and pictures in this incident of the ten lepers. One of the principal lessons is that the footstep followers of Christ are pictured by this thankful Samaritan. As the Samaritan had gratitude and thankfulness, so also those in Christ must have gratitude in their hearts. These, being a mixture of “Israelites indeed” and Gentiles is aptly pictured by Samaritans, who in natural life were a mixture of Israelites and Babylonians.

Leprosy denotes sin, and those who are healed of leprosy, symbolically speaking, are those who receive the benefits of the ransom. So also, those receiving these benefits say, in the words of the Apostle Paul, “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift,” (II Cor. 9:15) in appreciation for their cleansing from

the leprosy of sin. Romans 6:23 reads, "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." In this season of thanksgiving, we can ask ourselves, "Are we glad that we have the hope of eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord?" Thanks be to God!

"In every thing give thanks," admonishes the Apostle Paul, "for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." (I Thess. 5:18) Notice how earlier Paul says in I Thessalonians 4:3, "This is the will of God, even your sanctification." This implies that every experience which we receive for our edification and sanctification is also to be received with thankfulness. We are not only to be thankful for the pleasant experiences—the joyful experiences—but also the difficult and trying experiences.

We are to be concerned about one another's welfare and to hold each member of the body of Christ in the bonds of love. As the Apostle Paul wrote in Colossians 1:3, giving us the example, "We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you." Let us be thankful for all of our brethren in the narrow way, and let us pray for one another. This is gratitude, appreciation, and a thankful spirit in full operation.

We also should try to do good, and thus provoke thankfulness in others, as well as have the spirit of thankfulness ourselves. In the experiences which the Apostle Paul had in prison at Rome, the Philippian brethren were helpful to him, inspiring him to write, "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you." (Phil. 1:3,4) The spirit of thankfulness abounded in the Apostle Paul, and the mere thought of the wonderful Philippian brethren caused him

to be ever so thankful. Paul continues to write in this epistle, “Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy.” Paul was not only moved to prayer through remembrance of the Philippian brethren, but also he found it a real joy to pray for them.

Would it not be wonderful if this attitude displayed by the Apostle Paul was found everywhere in the world? To answer this question, let us go back again to the time when the ark of the covenant was brought to Jerusalem, as recorded in I Chronicles 16, and when David sang his song of thanksgiving. (vss. 8-34) In that event and in David’s song of thanksgiving, we have a prophecy of a still greater event to come. In Revelation 21:3, we read, “The tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.” Bringing the ark back to Jerusalem was intended to be a fore gleam of the blessed millennial kingdom of Christ, when God will be reconciled to men through the Christ. In this picture, David represents the Christ, and Israel represents the world of mankind. The song of thanksgiving sung by David will be taught to all mankind and sung by them in gratitude and appreciation of their Creator. This will be the true thanksgiving holiday that will be observed worldwide.

Now, only a few have the spirit of thankfulness and gratitude. However, then, in that kingdom, this spirit will be everywhere as God will “pour out” his “spirit upon all flesh.” (Joel 2:28) “O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever.” Praise ye the Lord! ■