

# The Voice of Thanksgiving

*“I will wash mine hands in innocency: so will I compass thine altar, O LORD: That I may publish with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all thy wondrous works.”*  
—Psalm 26:6,7

**IN THE UNITED STATES,** Thursday, November, 27th will be observed as Thanksgiving Day. It is a day in which people are encouraged to remember and give thanks to God for the blessings they have enjoyed at his hands during the year past. Certainly it is appropriate that all mankind recognize God's goodness, and endeavor in whatever way they can to show their appreciation. It is better to be thankful one day out of the year than not to be thankful at all.

As followers in the footsteps of Jesus, we should, above all others, give thanks to God. Every day with us should call for thanksgiving. We should be glad, too, to have our privilege of giving thanks brought especially to our attention by this national observance of Thanksgiving Day. Together with all the people, we appropriately should give thanks to God for the material blessings of food, raiment,

homes in which to live, and many of the other good things of life. However, if we are of those who have consecrated their lives to walk in the way of sacrifice with Jesus, there are blessings of far greater importance than those which have to do with our temporal needs.

All should be thankful for temporal blessings, for they are the necessities of daily life. How much more thankful we should be for those divine favors which are the necessities of eternal life. One of the most important of these spiritual blessings is the privilege of having a knowledge of God. "This is life eternal," Jesus said, "that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." (John 17:3) A knowledge of God is possible only by knowing his plan, or, as our opening text states, his "wondrous works," and our part in that plan. To recognize our part in the arrangements of God, and our share in his works, means having a knowledge of the manner in which he is dealing with us. It also requires an appreciation, by faith, of the Heavenly Father's providences in our lives, whether they be bitter or sweet.

## **KNOWLEDGE OF CREATION**

To comprehend and believe what the Scriptures say concerning the creative works of God are essential to knowing him. In those creative works as outlined in Genesis, we see displayed God's mighty power, his infinite wisdom, and his boundless love. In the events which followed creation, we observe God's justice displayed. How truly thankful we should be for this understanding, and that the Lord has given us eyes to discern and hearts to believe

what his Word declares to be the truth concerning creation. How wonderful is the knowledge of a God of perfect order and planning, as compared with the unbelief of many who claim that all life came into existence on its own, and whose only “god” is mere chance.

In the creation of man and God’s provision for him, we see the purpose of the Creator concerning the human race. Man was “made . . . a little lower than the angels,” the Scriptures declare. (Ps. 8:4-8) He was not half human and half angel, nor did he evolve from animals. He was “made,” the Scriptures say very simply. Man was created to live forever in perfection, and was given dominion over the earth and all the animal kingdom. He was not created to live temporarily and to suffer and die with the possibility of enjoying a better existence in some other part of the universe. This knowledge of the truth concerning man’s creation and the divine purpose for him may seem irrelevant, but it is well to remember with thankfulness what it means to us in connection with the complete plan of God, through which his character has been revealed to us. Creation is a fundamental truth which we should ever remember with appreciation.

## **MAN’S FALL**

Beautifully simple and understandable is the truth concerning the fall of man. Having been created perfect, and in the image of God, the Creator properly demanded absolute obedience. Man disobeyed, and the penalty of death was pronounced upon him. Here God’s justice is revealed. Everything that Adam possessed, including life itself, was his

because of God's goodness. The least he could have done was to manifest his appreciation by obeying the Creator's law. Yet, he failed to do even this, hence the withdrawal of his blessings by God was just and right. "Unto dust shalt thou return," God said. (Gen. 3:19) He did not say, "Unto eternal torture shalt thou go." Since man had been created to live, death—the cessation of life that was designed to go on forever—was God's just punishment.

It is a blessed thing to know the truth contained in the Scriptures, but when we recognize that its every detail contributes harmoniously to our acquaintance with God, then our knowledge becomes far broader and more meaningful. God's justice rightly condemned the race to death, but God's love provided a way of release from that penalty—without violating his justice. Because the Creator's love became operative, he began to make promises of future deliverance. The "seed" of the woman was to "bruise" the serpent's head. (Gen. 3:15) The "seed" of Abraham was to bless all the families of the earth. (Gen. 12:3; 28:14) A "King," a "Messiah," a "Prince of Peace," an "Everlasting Father," a "Redeemer," was to be sent. (Isa. 9:6,7; 59:20; Dan. 9:25,26; Zech. 9:9) A promise was given in the apostle's words that there were to be "times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." (Acts 3:21) For all these promises, we should be exceedingly thankful.

## **THE UNSPEAKABLE GIFT**

The divine provision of restitution wonderfully highlights the scriptural portrait of God. How meaningful is this knowledge in the light of God's

gift of his beloved Son in order that his plan for man's ultimate recovery might be accomplished in harmony with his will. We should be ever thankful for an understanding of the familiar text, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16) One of the greatest tragedies that could befall us as followers of Christ would be to lose our appreciation of this "unspeakable gift" of God's love.—II Cor. 9:15

Because the only begotten Son of God was made flesh for the suffering of death, and because he was faithful in laying down his earthly life to redeem the sin-cursed and dying world, God's great project of restitution will indeed be accomplished. Our knowledge of the Truth should give us such a vivid picture of God's interest in the world of mankind that we can truly thrill over the prospect of restitution for the poor groaning creation. Let us not think that we have no interest in restitution. True, we are not expecting earthly restitution for ourselves, if we are striving to follow in our Master's footsteps of sacrifice. However, we are in training to be the dispensers of the blessings of restitution to the world. This is a vital part of God's plan, and nothing that he has planned should ever be considered as commonplace by his children.

## **THE HIGH CALLING**

Jesus should mean much more to us than he does to the world in general. Indeed, he is the world's Redeemer, just as he is our Redeemer. However, he is also our Head, our Advocate, our High Priest, and

our future Bridegroom. As we think upon these blessed realities—and we will fail to be thankful if we do not think upon them—we are reminded of the glorious privilege that is ours of being workers together with God and with Christ in the outworking of the divine plan. Ours is a heavenly calling, and we have the privilege of running “toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”—Phil. 3:14

As we think of the various details of God’s loving plan which make it possible for us, as members of the fallen race, to enjoy such an exalted position as partners with him and with Jesus, our thankfulness should know no bounds. Therefore, nothing should be held back in the expression of our appreciation for his loving-kindness. We should be thankful every day of the year, and everything which we have and “all that is within” us should “bless his holy name.”—Ps. 103:1

The divine grace which makes it possible for us to be counted as acceptable servants of God is great cause for thankfulness. The proper appreciative viewpoint of this is expressed by Paul when he wrote, “The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.”—II Cor. 5:14,15

## **RECKONED PERFECT**

We should never forget what the merit of Christ’s sacrifice truly means with regard to our relationship with God. Because of this loving provision, God

views us as though we were perfect. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to us through faith in his blood, and God accepts our best endeavors as though they were perfect. (Rom. 4:6-8) Upon the basis of this we have the additional privilege of presenting our “bodies a living sacrifice”—no longer dead in trespasses and sins—with the assurance that they are “holy” and therefore “acceptable” to God. This, the apostle explains, is our “reasonable service”—the only reasonable way we can properly express our thankfulness for God’s grace.—Rom. 12:1

Our opening text gives us a similar thought. David, who was a picture of Christ and his footstep followers, said, “I will wash mine hands in innocency.” Jesus was innocent—“holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.” (Heb. 7:26) The sin of the fallen race did not contaminate him, and he was not responsible for it. Through the merit of his ransom sacrifice the true Christian enjoys the same blessed position of innocency. We should remember, however, that with Jesus, as well as with us, innocency before God is maintained only through faithfulness in the doing of his will. As such, righteousness in God’s sight is never accompanied by a negative, inactive attitude. Rather, it must produce to the greatest extent possible a positive, active obedience to his will. Jesus’ attitude was, “Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God.”—Heb. 10:7

The language of our text takes our minds into the court which surrounded the typical Tabernacle, where were located both the brazen altar and the laver of water. The priests washed at the laver, which foreshadowed our “washing of water by the

word.” (Eph. 5:26) It is only as we thus wash that we have a standing of innocency before God and have the privilege of offering sacrifice. Cleansing ourselves by the “water of the word” calls not only for a study of God’s Word, but also the bringing of ourselves into harmony with its righteous requirements. Briefly, these requirements are: recognition of and repentance for sin; faith in the shed blood of the Redeemer; full consecration to do God’s will; and a daily effort to conform our every thought, word and deed to the high standards of righteousness set forth in the Bible.

There is more to the Christian life, however, than to wash our “hands in innocency.” Our text gives us the further thought, saying, “So will I compass thine altar, O LORD.” The cleansing of our lives by the blood of Christ, and our best efforts to bring ourselves into line with the righteous requirements of the Word of God, are the necessary prerequisites to sacrifice, but these are not of themselves sacrifice. Recalling again the typical Tabernacle arrangement, the cleansing was done at the laver, but the sacrifice was made upon the altar.

## **SACRIFICE OF PRAISE**

David associates the altar—symbolic of sacrifice—with the voice of thanksgiving. This indicates that wholehearted thanksgiving calls for sacrifice. Nothing short of this should be considered an adequate response to the Lord in return for all that he has done for us. The Apostle Paul expresses this thought, saying, “By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.” (Heb. 13:15)

Here Paul may have had in mind the statement of Hosea 14:2, where the prophet speaks of rendering to God the “calves of our lips.” In any case, the thought is that true Christian thanksgiving involves sacrifice, as foreshadowed by the typical sacrifices of the Tabernacle.

There are various ways whereby we can offer the sacrifice of praise to God. We can sing hymns of praise which, without doubt, is pleasing to him. Not much in the way of sacrifice is involved, however, in this form of praise. Nevertheless, it is a delight to raise our voices in songs of praise to the giver of every good and perfect gift. We should also express our thanks to God by means of prayer. It is a blessed privilege to pour out our hearts to him in praise and adoration, telling him how much we love and appreciate him. Such incense of praise is a sweet-smelling savor to our Heavenly Father. It is this form of praise that is pictured more particularly by the offering of incense at the golden altar in The Holy of the Tabernacle.

We should remember that the coals of fire that burned the incense at the golden altar was brought by the priest from the brazen altar out in the court. If the fires of sacrifice were not burning on this altar there could be no burning of incense at the golden altar. The one depended upon the other. Although prayers, adorations and praises might be considered the most direct offerings of incense to the Lord, he has so arranged matters that we cannot offer these sincerely and acceptably except as we have his Spirit. If we have his Spirit, at the same time that we offer incense on the golden altar, we will be offering also upon the brazen altar in the

court good works. We will be seeking, “as we have therefore opportunity,” to “do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.”—Gal. 6:10

### **“THY WONDROUS WORKS”**

In our text, David explains another important aspect of the “voice of thanksgiving,” saying that we should tell of all God’s wondrous works. To do this means to bear witness to the Truth. David does not mean that we are to tell the Lord about his own works. Sometimes, when offering prayer in meetings of the Lord’s people, we may be inclined to tell the Heavenly Father considerable about his plan, but this is not necessary. God knows all about his own works and does not need us to remind him of these things. At the same time, however, the expression in prayer of thanksgiving and praise to God for his plan and all his wondrous works would always be in order.—Ps. 89:5; 107:8; 150:2

It is to others that we tell of God’s wondrous works. It is by doing this that we “shew forth the praises of him who hath called [us] out of darkness into his marvellous light.” (I Pet. 2:9) It is, indeed, a wonderful privilege to tell others of God’s works. Every feature of his plan is a delight to us, and our joy in the Truth increases as we tell it to others. Even when relating it to one another it becomes more precious, more wonderfully sweet.

There is no better way—in fact there is no other way at all—to live a true life of thanksgiving and praise to God than to lay down our lives in showing forth his praises. When we consider that all we have and all we hope for are ours by God’s grace,

then we will know that our debt of gratitude calls for nothing less than the devoting of our all to him, no longer living unto ourselves, but unto him.

It is this thought that is expressed by David in these well-known words: “What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people. Precious in the sight of the LORD is the [sacrificial] death of his saints. O LORD, truly I am thy servant, . . . and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds [released me from Adamic condemnation]. I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people.”—Ps. 116:12-18

Again the psalmist calls upon us to remember the Lord’s goodness with thanksgiving, saying: “Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing.” (chap. 107:21,22) Here, as elsewhere, David clearly associates thanksgiving with declaring the works of the Lord. This is a very practical arrangement. Had we received special favors from an earthly friend and wanted to show our appreciation by letting others know of his goodness, there would be no better way to do it than to tell of his works—of what he did for us.

The Lord has wonderfully favored us, and has bestowed rich blessings upon us. Grand are the things he has promised yet to do for us—and not

for us only, but also for the whole world. To tell of all these wonderful works of God it is necessary to proclaim the truth of his plan. Thus it is that in appreciation of what God has done for us, and because his love calls forth our love in return, we must become “the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.” (Matt. 5:14) Echoing the sentiments of Paul, we should say, “Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!”—I Cor. 9:16

### **THANKFUL FOR TRIALS**

As we count our many blessings and exercise the “voice of thanksgiving,” we should not overlook the trials which the Heavenly Father has permitted to come into our lives. If we had the choosing of our own experiences we would likely avoid the things which annoy, vex and try us. God, in his wisdom, however, sees that we need trials, and in his love permits them. If our wills are wholly resigned to him, then we will be thankful that he is providing all our needs, even trials and testings that are so necessary for the rounding out of our Christian characters.

Some of our trials may be permitted by God to test our faith and confidence in him. Others may be for the purpose of developing our patience and long-suffering. At times they may be in the nature of gentle chastening from the Lord. In any case, they are permitted by our Heavenly Father, who is too wise to err and too loving to be unkind. Even though he may permit severe experiences to come to us, it is done so in love, and our hearts should respond in grateful appreciation for this evidence that he is supplying all our needs for growth and development in Christ.

“In every thing give thanks,” the apostle exhorts. (I Thess. 5:18) None but truth-enlightened, consecrated followers of Christ can do this wholeheartedly. These understand that nothing can come into their lives except that which is for their eternal good. (Rom. 8:28) They know that they are the children of a loving Heavenly Father who is watching over their every interest. They have the assurance that even the minutest affairs of their lives, illustrated by the hairs of their head, are known by him, and directed according to his wisdom and love.—Luke 12:7

If we are truly thankful for the manner in which the Lord is directing our lives, we will not knowingly try to resist or go contrary to his will. Instead, with a prayer in our hearts and a song on our lips, we will continue to pay our vows unto him with thanksgiving, keeping our sacrifice on the altar until it is wholly consumed. “He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold,” said Job. (Job 23:10) With us, too, God allows the fires of affliction to come so that the gold of our character might be refined. How precious is the further thought that the Great Refiner tempers the heat. He will not permit us to be tested above that which we are able to bear. If he sees that the heat is becoming so intense that we are liable to be injured as New Creatures, he provides a way of escape. (I Cor. 10:13) Indeed, God knows and cares for us. (I Pet. 5:7) May this blessed truth become so thoroughly fixed in our minds and hearts that nothing will be able to disturb our inner peace and rest in him and in his promises.

We enjoy this knowledge because “God is the Lord, which hath shewed us light.” Therefore, let us “bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar.” (Ps. 118:27) Doing so, we will be inspired to respond “with the voice of thanksgiving,” making melody in our hearts unto the Lord. We will seek every opportunity to sound forth God’s praises throughout the land, and to “tell of all [his] wondrous works.” ■

*Protect me, LORD God! I run to you for safety, and I have said, “Only you are my Lord! Every good thing I have is a gift from you.”*

*Your people are wonderful, and they make me happy, but worshipers of other gods will have much sorrow. . . . You, Lord, are all I want! You are my choice, and you keep me safe. You make my life pleasant, and my future is bright.*

*I praise you, LORD, for being my guide. Even in the darkest night, your teachings fill my mind. I will always look to you, as you stand beside me and protect me from fear. With all my heart, I will celebrate, and I can safely rest.*

*I am your chosen one. . . . You have shown me the path to life, and you make me glad by being near to me. Sitting at your right side, I will always be joyful.*

*—Psalm 16:1-11*

*Contemporary English Version*