

## Reasons to Give Thanks Psalm 147

“Sing unto the Lord with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God.” That’s what verse 7 says, and we usually start our thanksgiving thoughts and prayers that way. And as we think about the terrible drought that holds Texas in its grip, and as we know how dry our own area has been lately, we easily move on to verse 8, thanking God for the clouds and the rain He gave us this last week.

And we can sing the second half of verse 8 with equally thankful hearts. For the grass doesn’t just make our lawns pretty – it feeds the cattle in the pastures all around us. And during this hunting season, as people come from all over the United States to marvel at the abundance of game in our woods, we can give thanks that we get to enjoy the beauty and bounty of the wildlife that God sustains here every day of the year, just like verse 9 says.

Yes, in just these three verses, we have many reasons to give thanks. But oftentimes we go on to verse 13. On Veterans’ Day as we honored those who gave their service and their very lives so that we might be free, we also gave God thanks for the protection with which He has blessed us, the bars He has placed on our gates. We also can give thanks that our children can go to school and come to church to learn about God’s Word and God’s world, and they have no need to fear. Truly they have been blessed.

And as verse 14 says, God has indeed filled us with the finest of wheat. Whenever we walk the aisles of the Piggly Wiggly or the M&M, I hope we give thanks for the astonishing abundance and variety of food that God has given us. When I was in grad school in Nashville, I went to a supermarket with an English friend. As we were walking through the bread aisle, gazing at the tremendous variety of loaves from which we could choose, he marveled, “You Americans are living in Disneyland!”

Yes, we Americans have many reasons to thank God this week. As we gather around our tables with family and friends, as we enjoy our blessings of peace and plenty, as we are surrounded by the incredible abundance of God’s creation here in this beautiful part of this beautiful state, I have no doubt that our hearts will indeed overflow. Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem; praise thy God, O Zion!

But just as there’s a whole lot more to this psalm, so there are many more reasons for us to give thanks during this season. And most of those reasons have to do with the character of God Himself.

In verse 2, for example, we see that our God builds up His people. In the Old Testament, God did this by gathering the outcasts of Israel. The Book of Exodus tells us how He brought His people out of slavery in Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Years later, after He had sent them into exile in Babylon because of their disobedience, the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah tell how He brought them back again to the Promised Land. God has always been in the business of reaching out, calling His people back home.

And the New Testament continues this story. For in Jesus Christ, God came into this beautiful and wonderful world that He had created. And even though He found Himself rejected by the very people He had made in His own image, He reached out to them anyway. He spoke words of peace and love, calling all who would trust in Christ to

join His family of faith. And His call still goes out today, welcoming all those who will repent and believe, from every tribe and tongue and nation.

And so as we gather with our families and friends this season, as we enjoy the presence of our loved ones, shouldn't we also thank God that He has reached out to those of us who trust in Him, making us part of His family, joining us to the whole body of believers from every age and every nation? Shouldn't we thank God that all people everywhere who love and trust Jesus as their Lord and Savior are our brothers and sisters in Christ? Praise God, for He gathers the outcasts and makes them His people!

And why does God do all this? Because of His great love. I know it's hard for many of us to believe, but the reason that God pours out His blessings on us so richly, the reasons that God enters into relationship with us is simply because He wants to. He desires to be in fellowship with us because He cares about us so much.

And because He cares, He does what verse 3 says – He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. He doesn't just bless us in the created world around us, and He doesn't just bless us by surrounding us with loved ones. No, He cares about how we feel, about our disappointments and doubts and fears. He cares when we are discouraged and lonely. And in the person of His Holy Spirit, He comes to those who trust in Him as a comforter and a counselor, a helper and a healer, even in the darkest times of life. Praise God for His love and compassion!

But God isn't just with us when we are in pain. God is someone Who can do something about whatever is bringing us grief. Look at Vv. 4-5. Oh, the stars look wonderfully comforting by their regular appearance in our night sky, and I'm sure that the psalmist wondered how God in His wisdom not only set so many of them in place but called each one of them by name.

But along with our modern study of astronomy should go an even greater measure of awe, an even greater reason for worship as we look up at the stars. For now we know that each one of them is as bright as the sun, and the only reason that they are so comparatively dim is because they are so far away. Moreover, now we know that stars are actually immense balls of hydrogen gas, compressed by gravitational forces so great that the hydrogen becomes helium in a process called nuclear fusion. That's why the sun gives off a light too bright to look at, and a heat that measures 11,000 degrees at its surface. Praise God for His power and might!

And yet it is our God, the God Who flung those flaming infernos across impossible distances and Who set the world spinning on its axis, the God who wrote the laws of physics and whose still mysterious gravitational forces hold the entire universe together, it is that God Who reaches out to us, holding us close whenever the disappointments of this world become too much for us. It is that God Who heals the brokenhearted and who binds up our wounds, who lifts up the meek in their affliction.

And we should also rejoice and give thanks because the God Who has power to solve our problems and to wipe away our tears is also a God of justice, a God Who will render to the wicked exactly what is due to them. That's what verse 6 tells us, and that should give us great comfort when we look at the injustice in the world around us. No, we may not live to see it happen, but make no mistake – God will not suffer the wicked to go unpunished. Those who abandon or abuse His little ones, those who defile or desecrate His church with impurity, those who prey upon His church with persecution will receive their reward. The God Who did not spare Sodom and Gomorrah in the days

of Lot will not spare the wicked on the Day when Jesus comes again. Praise God for His holiness and justice!

But is God's justice good news for us? After all, who among us is pure enough to stand in His presence, on that great day when He appears like a refiner's fire? Well, in verses 10 and 11 we find yet another reason to give thanks. For the good news is that God knows we are unable to obey His laws in our own strength. The good news is that, instead of delighting in the might of man, God takes pleasure in those who stand in awe of Him, those who cast themselves upon His mercy, those who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ to do for them what they cannot do for themselves, those who trust Jesus to save them from the power and penalty of their sins, those who trust Jesus to purchase them for Himself at the cost of His own blood. The good news is that all who trust in the Lord's love and power and compassion and justice will not be disappointed for all the reasons that the psalmist has listed for us. The good news is that the God whom the psalmist celebrated so many years ago is still our God today.

But how can we be sure that all of this is true? How can we know that this holy God of power and might and justice won't just give us what we deserve? How can we know that in His love and compassion He really does offer His free grace to all those who would surrender to His sovereign majesty, to all those who would acknowledge their sin and rebellion and who would embrace the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior? We can know all this is true because of what verse 19 tells us – because God has shown us His word.

Now, it is certainly the case that God has told us about Himself through His creation – the marks of His power and might, of His beauty and grace are so obvious in the world around us, aren't they? But the reason that we can see so many traces of God's character in the natural world is because His Word tells us what to look for. After all, other societies have looked at creation and perceived God to be as ravenous as a wolf, as pitiless as a tiger, as furious as a tornado, or as capricious as a bolt of lightning. Still others have looked at the cycle of the seasons and perceived God to be simply an impersonal force which fills all living things. And in our postmodern, pluralist society, who is to say that they are incorrect?

God is. For He is not only loving and compassionate. He is not only powerful and just. He is also faithful and true, and He has spoken His Word to His people. He told us about Himself through the mouths of His prophets, telling them the very words to say to His people. He told us about Himself through the mouths of His apostles, who were carried along by the Holy Spirit as they explained the Scriptures and as they recounted the words and deeds of Jesus.

And of course it is in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ Himself that God's Word has come to us most clearly, most immediately. For it is Jesus Christ alone Who is the brightness of God's glory and the express image of His person. Jesus is the eternal Word of God through Whom all things were made, and yet Who was made flesh and dwelt among us, revealing to us the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. It is because the Bible testifies to Jesus that we can know that every word of the Bible is true, true enough on which to stake our eternal destinies, true enough by which to guide our lives today.

So in this thanksgiving season, let's all give thanks for all the blessings God has given us: for the beauty and bounty of His creation, for the peace and prosperity of our

nation, for the love and comfort of our friends. But let's also thank God for Who He is, for the presence of the Holy Spirit in our times of discouragement and despair, for the promise of God's judgment on all who would persecute His church, for the welcome God offers to all those who would trust in Christ, for the Word of God which testifies to the Person and Work of Jesus, and which will never lead us astray. Let's give thanks to God for all these things, as we stand and sing the words of this psalm to His glory.