

A Heart of Thankfulness – Psalm 138

"I will give You thanks with all my heart..."(Psalm 138:1)

1 I will give You thanks with all my heart; I will sing praises to You before the gods. 2 I will bow down toward Your holy temple And give thanks to Your name for Your lovingkindness and Your truth; For You have magnified Your word according to all Your name. 3 On the day I called, You answered me; You made me bold with strength in my soul. 4 All the kings of the earth will give thanks to You, O Lord, When they have heard the words of Your mouth. 5 And they will sing of the ways of the Lord, For great is the glory of the Lord. 6 For though the Lord is exalted, Yet He regards the lowly, But the haughty He knows from afar. 7 Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me; You will stretch forth Your hand against the wrath of my enemies, And Your right hand will save me. 8 The Lord will accomplish what concerns me; Your lovingkindness, O Lord, is everlasting; Do not forsake the works of Your hands.

The story is told of a young boy who was looking forward to celebrating his tenth birthday. To him, it was going to be the very best day of his life. Invitations had been sent to eight of his best friends. After school, on a Friday afternoon, the boys all came to his house as they played football and basketball until dark – it was perfect. The boy's father grilled hot dogs and hamburgers while his mother made the finishing touches on the cake. After dinner and dessert came time for the presents, although the greatest joy was simply having all his friends with him. Since the boy had no brothers of his own, he was delighted.

But this was not the greatest part of the celebration in the boy's mind. As the climax of his birthday celebration, the young boy wanted to give a gift to his friends. In his mind, nothing was too good and no expense too great for his friends and so they all piled into his father's station wagon (how's that for dating this) and they made their way to the local high school for that evening's basketball game. The boy and his friends were all giddy with excitement as he walked up to the gym window and asked for nine 25-cent tickets for the game. The boy pictured in his mind the perfect ending to his birthday with four friends on one side and four on the other as they shared popcorn, punched each other and cheered for their high school heroes. The scene would be even happier than Jimmy Stewart at the end of the movie *A Wonderful Life*.

But the moment was painfully shattered. As soon as these nine boys entered the gym, they all scattered, not to be seen by the birthday boy again the rest of the night. Not one of the other boys thanked him for the fun, for the food, or for the ticket. There was not even an informative, "Happy Birthday, but I'm going to go sit with someone else." There were no words of gratitude or even a goodbye, just a sad ten year old boy in the bleachers, by himself, growing old alone. How sad!?

I share this story because it somewhat graphically reminds us of the way we often treat God. We speak of Him as first and supreme in our lives, we refer to Him as the guest of honor at our tables, in our homes and certainly in our worship. But how often is it that we might offer Him nothing more than a routine gift, sing to Him a few songs, sometimes without much thought and then totally neglect Him in favor of something else or someone else? Could it be that we are often like this boy's friends, who simply leave Jesus out without a twinge of conscience, unconcerned about our own insensitivity and yet somehow convinced that we have faithfully fulfilled our responsibilities to God and have rightly demonstrated a heart of thankfulness?

As we approach our nation's set apart day known as "Thanksgiving Day" – may I ask you *if you consider yourself* a thankful person? Are you known to others as a thankful person? Most of us are very aware that the scriptures call believers to be a thankful people. In 1 Thessalonians 5:18 there is the famous, ***"in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."*** We read in Ephesians 5:20 that God's people are to ***"always [be] giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father."*** Because of the goodness and grace of God in saving us from our sins, we are told in Colossians 2:7 that we are

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to **“overflowing with gratitude.”** In fact, according to Colossians 2:17 we are told, **“Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.”** How about it, do these verses describe you – are you a truly and deeply thankful child of God? I know that for most of us it is not a matter of wanting to – for I know we all want to be thankful, but are you thankful? And to whatever degree that you are thankful, do you believe that you could be even more thankful than you currently are? How do we go about it?

In our text this morning, we find David offering up to the Lord a hymn of thanksgiving, a short and simple declaration of David’s resolve, his reasons and his request to be a thankful person. And from this Psalm then I hope to show you this resolve of David, that you too might be determined to be thankful. I hope to show you David’s reasons for being thankful that you might ask yourself, do I thank the Lord for these things even as David did; and finally I would like to show you David’s request as he realizes His own shortcomings and His own dependence upon God to be thankful. It is my hope that by looking at such things, you might use them as a springboard to share with family and friends around the table why you are thankful to the God who has sent Jesus, His Son to be the Savior of all who believe on Him.

I. The Resolve to be Thankful (1-2a)

I will give You thanks with all my heart; I will sing praises to You before the gods. 2 I will bow down toward Your holy temple...

The first thing I would have you notice then from our text is what I would call David’s resolve to be thankful. I love the determination that is so clearly seen from the three “I will’s” of our text. David says, “I will give you thanks; I will sing praises; and I will bow down.” Let’s consider these resolves one by one.

The first resolves is **“I will give You thanks...”** The verb translated “give You thanks” is sometimes translated “praise” and the word praise and thanks are interchangeable – to praise the Lord is to thank the Lord and to thank the Lord is to praise Him. The word literally speaks of a confession, an exposing of that which is in the hands as in offering a gift. If I were to surprise my wife with a new diamond ring, I might clench it in my hand, and then, when I was ready to give it to her, I would open my hand so that she might clearly see what it is that I offer her as a gift. Beloved, our thanksgiving is to be purposely conceived, thought of and then brought openly before God; it is to be clear; it is to be a praise, it is to be something that openly confesses the goodness of God. We might paraphrase David’s thought here – “I will openly confess the goodness of who You are and what You have done.”

And then notice the qualifier attached, this open confession of God is not done thoughtlessly; it is not done haphazardly; it not done simply on the spur of the moment; but it is with **“all my heart”** – this praise, this offering of thanks, this reciting to God the goodness of His Person and actions is “whole-hearted” – the word **“all”** speaks of every area of the heart or symbolically speaking every aspect of David’s life was being given over to this purpose, the confession of the greatness of God. It did not matter if David was a lonely shepherd out in the field; his resolve was to confess, to render an accounting of who God is. It did not matter if David was soon to be King; his resolve was to declare the glories of God. And so it ought to be the resolved of everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord, that your life, whether you are a student, or a financial advisor, or a nurse, or a housewife – are you resolved to give to the Lord every area of your life, your heart, your mind, your will so that you may fully recount and confess the goodness of God? **“I will give You thanks with all my heart...!”**

But notice this confession does not happen in a vacuum; it does not stay in a closet as we note the next resolve where David says, **“I will sing praises to You before the gods.”** Let us consider first the action, **“I will sing praises....”** We know that David was rather gifted in writing

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music and evidently he might have had a decent voice. We know that he played instruments. But we also see in David's life a willingness to sing and declare God's worth in song. Whether he played for King Saul, or sang in victory over the Philistines, or simply offered up to God a hymn of praise, we know that David's music was often "before others." David was unashamed to sing songs of praise to his God. Our text is honestly a bit ambiguous saying, **"I will sing praises to Your before the gods."** The word "gods" there is the Hebrew word *elohim*, often translated "God" speaking of the Lord. Sometimes the word refers to the angels of God and sometimes, given the context, the word can mean strong or mighty ones. Personally I take it in this later sense, that David is resolved not simply to speak the praises of God, but that He is also willing to sing the praises of God before even the mightiest men of the earth. We see this a bit more in verse 4. But the point is, David is not ashamed to lift up His voice in praise to God. How about you? I know that some can get embarrassed about singing; about singing before others; but whether David had a good voice or not, He was determined to sing praises before others. If these "gods" do refer to angles, I doubt that David could hold his own against the angelic choir, but all David knew was that his heart was so filled with the goodness of God that he had to sing it out, even before others?

Let me ask you, when you give thanks to God, does it regularly cross your mind to give it in the form of song? Perhaps as you gather around the Thanksgiving table this Thursday, you might consider a song or two you might all sing that declares the praises of God. But seek to make a regular practice – resolve to sing the praises of God before others.

The final resolve here is like that which we have just seen, a resolve to praise and worship, but only this resolve seeks to make sure the true object of praise is God. David says, **"I will bow down"** – I will lay myself out toward the temple, that is toward the dwelling place of God. Remember that David did not have an earthly temple. He saw the glory of the Lord over the tent and so it must be that David here is resolving to make sure that all His worship, all His praise is always looking toward God – God-directed. It should not be, "Wow, I really like that new song of praise, but rather, does God like that song of praise." Here we see that David does not want to be distracted with lesser things. When he worships, when he offers his thanksgiving, he wants his whole heart to be committed; he wants all around him, great and small to know who He is thanking and he wants to be fixed on God alone; worshipping God alone. This is David's resolve to give thanks – may you determine to make your own as well.

II. The Reasons to be Thankful (2b-8a)

And give thanks to Your name for Your lovingkindness and Your truth...

I see the main bulk of this Psalm as David's expression of thanks, or better put, his reasons for giving thanks to God. I am so grateful to the Lord that He provides us with such godly examples, that when we falter or begin to fail to practice genuine thankfulness, we can look to such examples for direction. I see in these verses seven reasons for which David was thankful to the Lord. To be sure, there are far more than seven, but if you ever find yourself at a loss, or need a place to start in expressing thankfulness to God, turn to these verses before us and see if you can give God thanks for the same reasons David did. As a final disclaimer, I am only going to focus on the key attribute of David's thankfulness. There is much more we could consider, but let us key in on these seven reasons for David's thankfulness to God and seek to own them ourselves.

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1. We thank God for His lovingkindness (2b)

And give thanks to Your name for Your lovingkindness...

The first of the reasons David gives for giving the Lord thanks is for the His lovingkindness. This word is perhaps one of the most significant in the Old Testament. It is used some 240 times and is most frequently used in the Psalms. Lovingkindness is so rich and broad in its meaning that we need a number of words just to cover it, words like as mercy, compassion, goodness, steadfast or unflinching love, faithfulness, grace and devotion.

There is a sense in which if we fail to consider all of these ideas when we speak of the lovingkindness of the Lord, we will fail in appreciating and rightly giving thanks to the Lord. The lovingkindness of the Lord speaks of God's commitment and generosity to His people. Of course David has in mind both himself and the nation of Israel as the needful recipients of God's protection and blessing. And this points us to another aspect of what David is commenting on and that is the truth that lovingkindness is always doing, showing or keeping something. In other words, God is always at work – in this case as evidenced in the life of David. A reading through the life of David quickly reveals that God was constantly revealing His lovingkindness, His grace, mercy, compassion and steadfast love to David. David pictures for us the reality of every person, namely that we all need the lovingkindness of the Lord because we all need redemption from sin, from enemies, and from troubles. And while David surely experienced the lovingkindness of the Lord in physical deliverance or salvation from not only enemies like the Philistines, but also from his own sinful actions like those with Bathsheba, the greatest expression of lovingkindness, of this mercy, grace and kindness is experienced being delivered from the full and final consequences of sin. And is this not what we read in the New Testament. Romans 2:4 tells us...

Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?

And then we read in Titus 3:5 a similar truth,

He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy...

Beloved, we ought to regularly and continually be thanking the Lord for His undeserved, kind and gracious lovingkindness. This compassion sent His Son to earth to be our substitute for sin and our example for life. How often do you thank Him for this and other such expressions of mercy?

2. We thank God for His truth (2b)

And give thanks to Your name for...Your truth; for You have magnified Your word according to all Your name.

In addition to thanking the Lord for His gracious love and mercy, David next thanks the Lord for His truth. The word for truth here can speak either of the sum of what God has communicated (His revelation – the Word of God) or it can speak of the character of God; namely that God is truth; He is absolutely faithful in all that He says and does. When God gave David the promise of the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7, a promise of land, of descendants to rule on the throne of his kingdom and of blessings, David had no reason to doubt or mistrust God for even up to this point David had been the recipient and experiencer of many promises of God. So sure were the promises of God in the mind of David that he equates them with the name of God saying, "for you have magnified, exalted, revealed as absolutely sure your promises in

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accordance with who you are as summed up in Your name – You are the LORD – the all-powerful, self-existent God who pours out grace and truth upon those who believe on you.

I love the picture David paints here with the lovingkindness and truth of God, thanking God that He is a sure God of both love and faithfulness, of both grace and truth. In fact, we find the apostle John making a similar statement about the Lord Jesus Christ in John 1:17 where we read:

For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth (lovingkindness and faithfulness) were realized through Jesus Christ.

How often to you thank the Lord for being the God of all grace and truth; the God whose truth is not mostly right; or mostly dependable, to is always right, always dependable? So while we certainly have a heaviness of heart when we hear that we were born enemies of God and spiritually dead to Him because of sin; we, because we trust in the faithfulness of God's word can rejoice in the good news that through Jesus enemies may be reconciled and those who were dead may be born again, born into the family of God, no longer bearing the family resemblance of Adam, our fallen sinful representative, but now bearing the family resemblance of Jesus, our risen, holy representative! Let us give thanks for such a truth as this.

3. We thank God for His answers (3)

On the day I called, You answered me; You made me bold with strength in my soul.

David gives a third reason for being thankful – our God is a God who hears the cries of His people and answers them; granting them boldness and strength to endure, to resist, to persevere. We know that David experienced sweet communion; closeness with God as he cried, and prayed and poured out his heart before God. But David's thankfulness was not limited to only communion with God, but he also experienced sweet communication from God. David's prayer life was not "one-way" – David called out to God; he lifted up his voice and God did what – God answered Him. David experienced much answered prayer. We don't know the exact occasion of this Psalm, but whatever were David's circumstances, he prayed to God and not only did God answer him, but he happened to answer him quickly – "on the day I called". I love the way Matthew Henry – that great old commentator of the Scriptures, put it –

"Those that trade with heaven by prayer grow rich by quick returns."

Now this does not mean that God necessarily gave David something material; or smote an enemy; or immediately healed a sickness, for the answer that David speaks of is spiritual, not material. God gave to David an assurance of heart, a strength of spirit, a boldness of soul. God gave to David a spiritual strength and resolve to stand firm in the midst of his trials or temptations; God enabled David to continue looking to and loving the Lord in spite of his circumstances. And for David, the man after God's own heart, there was nothing more precious than knowing God had increased his faith. And beloved, shall we not follow David's example and give thanks to God; knowing that as we fervently cry out to God, while we may not always see immediate tangible results, we can experience, we ought to experience, we must know the presence of God who strengthens our faith and causes our hearts to rejoice in Him and trust in Him even in the midst of trials.

Is this not what we have seen in our study of 1 Peter? Recall the words of 1 Peter 1:6-7 where trials and circumstances are not always met with immediate physical relief, but always with

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the knowledge that our faith in God will be strengthened and that faith will result in thanksgiving and praise. We read,

6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7 so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ...

Oh that we would pray to God for a faith that results in such thanksgiving and be spiritually aware enough to know our very souls are being given a boldness and strength to endure.

4. We thank God for His glory (4-5)

4 All the kings of the earth will give thanks to You, O Lord, when they have heard the words of Your mouth. 5 And they will sing of the ways of the Lord, for great is the glory of the Lord.

The fourth reason David gives for giving thanks to the Lord is that there is a coming day when all the kings of the earth, as representative of all the peoples of the earth, will hear and heed the word of the Lord. I believe David here saw himself as being a position to speak to the kings of the surrounding nations; to declare to them the lovingkindness and truth of the Lord. But there is a look to the future here, and to some degree David knew that this time of universal thanksgiving to God was yet future. And we know that such a time is said to exist in the future under the reign and rule of the greatest of David's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

These verse tell us that there will a judgment, a casting off of all those who would not give thanks and worship the Lord Jesus, for all the kings; every tribe, tongue and nation will praise the Lord when Christ reigns. So we find David wanting to influence others around him to such a giving of thanks as well as looking forward to the ultimate time of giving of thanks. I like that David expects of all people what he himself resolved in verses 1-2. These kings will give thanks to the Lord, even as David resolved. These kings and peoples will sing of the ways of the Lord, even as David resolved to sing before the mighty ones. And these kings and people will bow down and worship as they perceive the glory of the Lord even as David resolved to bow down before the presence of God. Please note that there is no one worshipping here that does not want to...those who refuse to submit to the Lord Jesus Christ will not be forced to do these things, for they will be doomed and cast off into the eternal torments of hell, while those who have come to Jesus, who have trusted in His work for them on the cross and submit themselves to Him as King, these rejoice and they bask in the glory of Lord; the light of Lord, the goodness of the Lord; the very presence of the Lord.

Do you give thanks for God's glory, that He has allowed you to get even a glimpse of it now; that He imparts to you an anticipation of basking in His glory or all eternity? David did and not only for himself, but he also gave thanks to God for others who would bask with Him in the glory of God.

5. We thank God for His regard (6)

For though the Lord is exalted, Yet He regards the lowly, but the haughty He knows from afar.

The fifth thing for which David thanks the Lord is for His regard of those who are lowly. Indeed the Lord is exalted, meaning that He needs nothing from any of His creatures and that there is nothing we can do that benefits Him. And yet, out of His lovingkindness, He has chosen to smile upon us, to be pleased with us, to pour out His mercy on us. But who is the us? What is the qualifier? The Lord regards the lowly, the humble, the broken in spirit, those who understand that they need God; they need His mercy; they need Him to act for unless the Lord acts on our

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behalf we shall all eternally perish. The lowly are those who know that Romans 3:23 speaks of them, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. The lowly are those who like the tax-collector of Luke 18 cries out, "Lord, have mercy on me the sinner." The lowly are those who see the beauty in the wounds and scars of our Lord Jesus who gave Himself as the substitute for their sins; who died for them so that they might live for God. These are the lowly. Is this you? Are you thankful to be lowly; to be dependent upon the mercy of God; to know that God did for you what you could not do for yourself? Does this cause you continual thanksgiving? Because if it does not, the alternative is that you are haughty, you are proud, you are arrogant if you think there is something you can contribute to God; or secure your salvation with; or perhaps even think that you need no God at all. These David says, the Lord knows from afar. The idea here is that the Lord will keep a great distance an impassable gulf between Himself and the proud. So, are you thankful today for being lowly before the Lord or are you proud and confident in yourself? David was thankful for being lowly.

6. We thank God for His salvation (7)

7 Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me; You will stretch forth Your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and Your right hand will save me.

The sixth reason David gives for being thankful is for God's salvation or deliverance. We do not have the time to develop all this, but I love this verse from a spiritual perspective. For indeed David did have physical troubles and enemies from which the Lord saved him, but there is a spiritual truth in here as well. For indeed all of us either have or are walking in the midst of trouble. According to the Word of God, we are all conceived in sin, sinners by birth and therefore separated from the presence of God. Although physically born alive, Ephesians 2:1 tells us we are also all born spiritually dead. Such a trouble is ours. But note, it is the Lord who revives. Even as the Lord revived, restored, and strengthened David, the Lord revives, He awakens, and He opens our dead eyes to behold His beauty.

And did not the Lord stretch forth His hand to destroy our greatest enemies of sin and death. Did not the Lord Jesus stretch forth both hands on the cross to put to death the enemy of death for all who would believe on Him? And note as well the reference to it being the Lord's right hand who accomplishes this salvation. And do we not know that it is Jesus who saves, and it is Jesus who came from the right hand of the Father and it is Jesus who now sits at the right hand of the Father in glory, honor and power?

Let us be a people who continually thank the Lord for so great a salvation. For the Lord Jesus has met us in our walk in trouble and by His Spirit has revived us, made us alive and has destroyed our enemies, saving us, granting us eternal life in His presence. Amen and Amen.

7. We thank God for His accomplishments (8a)

The Lord will accomplish what concerns me; Your lovingkindness, O Lord, is everlasting...

The final reason David gives as a reason for giving thanks to the Lord is that He is a God who accomplishes what concerns us. David has as his assurance that whatever good work God has begun in and for His people He will perform it. The KJV reads this way, "**The Lord will perfect that which concerns me...**" This is an OT equivalent to that often cited promise of Philippians 1:6, "**For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.**"

Beloved, are you confident and believe that whatever is most needful to you, the Lord God will do what is best? So often we are consumed by many things that are not really our biggest concerns. We might be consumed with concern over getting our computer working right while the Lord is working on hearts and attitudes being right. But God will accomplish those things that

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concern us. And part of that is simply God reminding us of our greatest concern, that we would come to desire to know and love the Lord all the more. For everyone born of God will become increasingly more concerned about how he lives his life before God, that he might live it faithfully and to the glory of God. Do you see this work in you? A work that is motivated by the steadfast and everlasting love of God? Are you thankful that even while you might stumble at times, the Lord always reminds you that He is accomplishing His purposes in you and that He is instilling in you a concern for following after Him? Do you see God changing your heart in such concerns? Can you give Him thanks that while you get distracted with lesser things, He yet brings to your mind that you are His child and wants to live boldly for Him? May the Lord be accomplishing this in you.

III. The Request to be Thankful (8b)

Do not forsake the works of Your hands.

Having considered some of the reason for which we might offer thanksgiving to God, I would have you notice David's final statement, which is in fact a request, a petition to be thankful by saying, "Do not forsake the works of Your hands." This may seem to be a strange request until we realize that it is our own natural tendency to move away from God. Beloved, we give the Lord more than enough reasons to forsake us, do we not? God is always faithful to us but we are often unfaithful. God always expresses perfect love and devotion to us and we express at best imperfect love. And while David is assured of the steadfast and unfailing love of God for him, he yet is humble and requests of the Lord His continued working and influence in his life. David cannot be thankful on his own. If left to himself, David will fail and so the plea... "do not forsake; do not cast aside; do not leave alone the works of Your hands." Are you thankful? For whatever good there is in us it is the work of God's own hands. It is God who works in us both to will and to do. If the Lord would forsake this work, it will absolutely fail. But, for His glory, the Lord, as the perfecting God, is so much concerned in the progress of lives to the end that we may in faith pray, "Lord, do not forsake it." Let us thank the Lord for those whom He loves He loves to the end; and, as for God, His work is perfect.

Beloved, daily we are invited to the celebration of God; to thank Him for inviting us to be His children, the recipients of His grace and mercy. Daily we ought to be thanking Him for such things as these and not be like the ungrateful boys at the ten year olds party. Let us be a thankful people, giving all glory and praise to the God who has so graciously given us all things for life and godliness in Jesus Christ. Amen and Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

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