

Are We Thankful People?

Text: Psa 116:12-14

Suggested Hymns:

Tan: 563, 564, 568, 560, 567

Ade: 814, 566, 564, 568, 567

1) Are we thankful people?

2) We ought to be thankful people

3) Let us be thankful people

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Psalm 116:12-14, ¹² *What shall I render to the LORD For all His benefits toward me?* ¹³ *I will take up the cup of salvation, And call upon the name of the LORD.* ¹⁴ *I will pay my vows to the LORD Now in the presence of all His people.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Today we have come to the house of God for a service of thanksgiving, and in particular Harvest Thanksgiving. But are we really thankful people?

Gratitude is one of the most beautiful flowers in the garden of Christian virtues. But it is also one of the rarest. Whether or not these Harvest Thanksgiving services are pleasing to God and of benefit to us depends not so much on what we say and do as on what we are.

Are we thankful people? Strange as it may sound, it seems to be one of the wayward characteristics of human nature that the more we have for which to be thankful, the less grateful we really are.

May the Lord bless our meditation as we consider the question, *Are We Thankful People?*

1. Are We Thankful People?

The Psalmist was a thankful person. His words breathe a spirit of genuine gratitude. He searched back into past experiences of his life, he looked round about himself, and everywhere he saw the evidences of God's goodness.

We read in Psalm 116:2-8, ² *Because [the LORD] has inclined His ear to me, Therefore I will call upon Him as long as I live.* ³ *The pains of death surrounded me, And the pangs of Sheol laid hold of me; I found trouble and sorrow.* ⁴ *Then I called upon the name of the LORD: “O LORD, I implore You, deliver my soul!”* ⁵ *Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; Yes, our God is merciful.* ⁶ *The LORD preserves the simple; I was brought low, and He saved me.* ⁷ *Return to your rest, O my soul, For the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.* ⁸ *For You have delivered my soul from death, My eyes from tears, And my feet from falling.* What he saw made him grateful and drew from him the thanksgiving of our text.

Are these words an accurate reflection of your own gratitude? Are you a thankful person?

Today it would seem that we are. Today we are having our annual Harvest Thanksgiving Service. We have come to gather for a joyful Service of thanksgiving. There is a spirit evident among us today, there is a quality in our singing, that would seem to say: *“Yes, we are thankful people.”*

But are we really thankful? Is gratitude a noticeable virtue among us? There are some disturbing signs that would seem to indicate a negative answer. The mere observance of the day doesn't necessarily indicate that a person is thankful.

Besides, you cannot pay a year's debt of gratitude with one day's thanksgiving. If, as we sit at our bountiful tables, we were to see pressed against our windows the hollow eyes and sunken cheeks of some of the world's starving people, wouldn't we get an uneasy feeling that we are taking our blessings too much for granted? Are we really thankful people?

The extent and depth of our gratitude can be measured by our love toward God and our fellow men. But when we apply that measure, what do we find? The love we give to God, the service we render to Him, the gifts we lay at His feet, the sympathy and kindness we show to others, add it all up, and what does it come to?

If the total is an honest reflection of the measure of our gratitude, then we may well pause to ask ourselves: Are we really thankful people?

Happiness and contentment are closely related to gratitude. The average Australian can buy more goods today than twenty-five years ago, and he can buy better goods. But are we that much happier, more content, and more grateful?

We behave very strangely sometimes. We are prone to play up our misfortunes and to play down our good fortune. Remind a person of how good he has it, and you may perhaps hear the reply, “*Well, yes—but.*” We can forget a hundred blessings and remember one misfortune.

We are often tempted to fret and complain. We become impatient, discontented, and ill tempered. Sometimes we are cold and smug, not deeply touched by the misfortunes of others. Are these the marks of a humble and grateful heart?

Put all the blessings we enjoy on one side of the scale, are they balanced by the gratitude we are putting on the other side? Are we thankful people?

Look at the ills that afflict our nation and the world today. They are of our own making. To a great extent we can lay them to our forgetfulness of God and His favours. God delights to pour out His blessings in rich measure on those who receive them with humble, grateful hearts. Gratitude causes further blessings to flow. But ingratitude stops the flow of divine blessings.

We read in Deuteronomy 8:19-20, ¹⁹ “*Then it shall be, if you by any means forget the LORD your God, and follow other gods, and serve them and worship them, I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish.*” ²⁰ “*As the nations which the LORD destroys before you, so you shall perish, because you would not be obedient to the voice of the LORD your God.*” Read also Isaiah chapter 1.

We so easily forget that the same loving hand that sustains us and provides for us in such abundance, the hand of which the Psalmist says, in Psalm 145:16 ¹⁶ *You open Your hand And satisfy the desire of every living thing,* is the same hand that can also crush and destroy the unthankful.

Are we thankful people? It isn't as simple a question, and as easily answered, as it might have seemed at first. In fact, it is a rather embarrassing and disturbing question. And it calls for an honest answer. What is your answer?

2. We Ought To Be Thankful People

The Psalmist was thankful because he took stock of the Lord's goodness toward him and was amazed at what he found and what it added up to. He counted up his blessings with the result that he asked, *What shall I render to the LORD For all His benefits toward me?*

Let us therefore look at some of the reasons for our gratitude. Thanksgiving ought to be the natural response to the many blessings we enjoy. Let us count them, and, like the Psalmist, we shall be amazed at the total, especially if we count also some of the things we don't have.

Let's start right where we are. This is God's house. Here He pronounces salvation among men. Here we are, all sinners, in need of cleansing and healing and saving. And here God reaches out through His Word and Sacraments to touch and heal our souls.

Here He makes known to us His saving love. He tells us of the lengths to which He has gone to rescue us from eternal ruin and to make us His beloved children and heirs of heaven. We read in Romans 8:32, ³² *He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?* And the Son of God gave Himself into death to redeem us from sin, death, and eternal woe. That is the Gospel that brings comfort and peace, joy and hope, to the soul.

Among all the gifts with which God enriches our lives and which ought to call forth our thanksgiving, His redeeming, forgiving love ranks first. Let us put it in first place, and keep it there, just as David mentions this blessing first in Psalm 103:3, ³ *Who forgives all your iniquities.*

A person may be poor in other things; but when he knows himself to be an object of God's tender love, redeemed by the blood of Jesus, and an heir of heaven through Christ, he has something that money cannot buy and for which all the material wealth in the world is no substitute.

A person who is concerned only about his health will find nothing to be grateful for, when his health is gone. But when a person knows the misery and wretchedness of a soul burdened with sin and guilt, and then remembers the pain,

anguish, and death that Jesus endured to save him, he has something to be thankful for every day of his life.

He may be poor, he may be passing through some severe trial, his heart may be heavy with some recent sorrow, but he has the comfort that God is still Love, that His thoughts toward him are thoughts of kindness, and that He means it well with him.

And so, although things may look dark at the moment and the man must say with a submissive heart, *"Thy will be done,"* yet he can also say with a grateful heart, *"Blessed be the name of the Lord!"*

In our survey of God's gifts let us next take stock of the material blessings we enjoy in our homes, in our personal lives, and in this wonderful land of ours. We are better off by far than millions of our fellow men in other countries. The list of blessings includes the harvest of the land.

We are better fed, better clothed, and better housed. We enjoy better health facilities and educational advantages. In our homes we enjoy comforts, conveniences, and luxuries that don't exist, even in the dreams, of many people in other parts of the world.

Here in Australia, even with all its faults, we enjoy advantages, a freedom, and a standard of living for which other nations envy us. They may find fault with us, but they would like to live among us. Some of our fellow citizens criticise our nation and try to sow the seeds of unrest and rebellion, but we don't see them forming a line to get out.

As we take stock of our personal and national blessings, we can apply to our nation the words which Moses once spoke to Israel, in Deuteronomy 33:29, ²⁹ ***Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD, The shield of your help And the sword of your majesty! Your enemies shall submit to you, And you shall tread down their high places.***"

Our thanksgiving also ought to be prompted also by some things we do not have. We don't have the ruins of war around us; we don't have slavery; we don't have persecution; and we don't have famine. But they do have those things elsewhere.

All this is all the more remarkable when we consider that all these blessings are free gifts of God's love and wholly undeserved by us. We have repaid God's goodness with thoughtlessness and selfishness, complaint and ingratitude. He has given us so much, and we have given Him so little. Yet He does not deal with us as we deserve.

As we view the picture of God's goodness against the dark background of our own unworthiness, we must say: "*Lord, who are we that You have dealt so bountifully with us?*" On this Harvest Thanksgiving Day we must be reminded of Jacob's confession and make it our own as we read in Genesis 32:10 ¹⁰ "***I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant.***"

Yes, we ought to be thankful people. We have every reason to be. No matter where we look or from what angle we view our blessings, the view is one that ought to stir our hearts.

3. Let Us Be Thankful People

We cannot remain indifferent to the sight that greets our eyes as the picture of God's goodness is unfolded before us. There must be some response on our part. The Psalmist didn't remain indifferent to the view that met his eyes as he counted up his blessings. He knew that he must do something about it.

This was his response, ¹³ ***I will take up the cup of salvation, And call upon the name of the LORD.*** ¹⁴ ***I will pay my vows to the LORD Now in the presence of all His people.***

This also reminds us of the drink offerings prescribed in the Old Testament¹ which were brought to the Lord as an expression of thanksgiving for His goodness. It also reminds us of the cup of wine which the head of the house would lift up after the Passover meal in praise of God's mercy and then pass around to the other guests.

The Psalmist views his blessings as a cup filled with the goodness of the Lord. Therefore he resolves to give testimony to God's goodness and to his own gratitude in exercises of public worship.

That is what we are doing today. In response to the invitation "*Come, ye thankful people, come!*"² we have gathered in God's house in company with

others to lift the cup which God has filled with His mercies, to acknowledge His goodness and our own unworthiness, and then lift our hearts and voices in thanksgiving.

We are doing that now, as this day brings God's kindness to our remembrance. How can we do otherwise? In view of all the blessings with which God has enriched our lives, it is only natural that we should join in this public service to acknowledge His goodness and to express our gratitude. We are paying our vows of thanksgiving to the Lord now in the presence of His people.

Let us also remember that every day should be thanksgiving and that these vows that we pay today should be only the beginning. They will be worthless if we forget them as soon as this day is done.

After all, never a day passes that we do not drink of the cup of God's kindness. His mercies are new for us every morning. There are the common blessings, food, clothing, shelter, and life itself that we enjoy every day. And there are many days that bring some special happiness into our lives. So every day ought to be a thanksgiving day.

How can we let these daily blessings pass by unnoticed and then imagine that we can crowd into one day all the thanks we owe to God for a whole year of His goodness? Let this day be an occasion for adding fresh fuel to the fire of our gratitude so that it will go on burning brightly through the days to come. Let every day be thanksgiving day.

We shall find, too, that the daily practice of thanksgiving will be a tonic to our soul. It will make us happier and more cheerful; it will make us more content with what we have and less prone to complain about the things we don't have.

Finally, our thanksgiving must be translated into thanks-living. Our vows and expressions of gratitude dare not stand alone. They must lead to something else; otherwise they have a hollow sound.

If we are truly grateful people, it will only natural that we translate our daily thanksgiving into a life of daily service to a gracious and loving God. No task will be too great to do for Him who has done so much for us. No sacrifice of time and strength will be too great to give to that Saviour who sacrificed Himself for us.

No gift that He may ask of us will be too much for Him who gave all for us. No deed of kindness that we may do to others will be too much to do in the name of Him who does so much for us.

Let that be the measure of our thanksgiving. Then we shall be making our thanksgiving real, and we shall be giving evidence that we are thankful people.

Are we thankful people? We ought to be. Today it would seem that we are. But the real proof will come tomorrow and the next day and in all the days that follow. Then, too, may we be found to be thankful people until at last in heaven we lift our voices in an eternal hymn of thanksgiving to the God of our salvation, as we read in Revelation 7:12, ¹² *saying: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, Be to our God forever and ever. Amen."*

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Lev. 23:13; Num. 15:5, 10; 28:7

² Hymn 564