

The Sacrifice Of Thanksgiving.

Text: Jonah 2:9

1) How it Is To Be Brought

Suggested Hymns:

2) What It is For

563, 568, 567, 565, 564

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 Jonah 2:9, ***9 But I will sacrifice to You With the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD.*** (NKJV)

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

Dear friends in Christ,

I will sacrifice to You With the voice of thanksgiving.

These are words of the Prophet Jonah. The Word of the Lord had come to Jonah that he must go to the great city of Nineveh, and preach destruction to the inhabitants, if they did not repent of their sins.

But Jonah had no desire to proclaim the Lord's Word to these far-away heathen. He fled from the presence of the Lord, boarded a ship at Joppa, and went out upon the sea. A fearful storm came. The sea roared and foamed. The waves dashed into the boat which was heavily loaded, and a part of the cargo had to be thrown overboard to lighten the ship.

But the storm increased, and the ship was tossed about on the crest of the waves. All seemed lost, and the mariners prayed to their heathen gods for help. Jonah, who was fast asleep, was roused by the shipmaster and told to pray to his God.

But the crew did not know what to make of this peculiar storm. They came to the conclusion that someone on board must be the cause of it. To find out the evil-doer, they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah. He readily admitted that he was the cause, because he had fled from the presence of the Lord, and so that the sea might be calmed, he advised them to cast him into the sea.

This they did, and no sooner had he disappeared in the water than a great fish which the Lord had prepared swallowed him. There, in the belly of the fish, Jonah came to his senses. He was preserved and kept alive by the Lord in a most wonderful way.

Three days and three nights¹ he had to remain cramped together in the belly of the fish until the fish vomited him out upon the dry land. But he made good use of his time. He prayed to the Lord, and so confident was he of deliverance that he promised to offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and made a vow to that effect, expecting salvation from the Lord.

At that time the sacrifice of thanksgiving consisted of animals that were slain and burned upon an altar, according to the ceremonial law. Such also was the sacrifice of Jonah. All these sacrifices were to foreshadow the great sacrifice of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Now, in the time of the New Testament, the blood of animals need no more flow; for Christ has come and has sacrificed Himself for us. Still, in a different form, we Christians are required to bring sacrifices of thanksgiving.

Let us consider, then, on this Harvest Thanksgiving Day, *The Sacrifice Of Thanksgiving*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. How The Sacrifice Of Thanksgiving Is To Be Brought

Our text begins, *I will sacrifice to You With the voice of thanksgiving*. With the voice. If we know and feel that we should thank God, we must express that and do that, first of all, with the lips.

Why did God endow you with a gift by which you are made far superior to other creatures? Why did He endow you with the gift of speech? Was it not that with your voice, with your lips and tongue, you should thank Him, praise Him, glorify Him who is the Giver of every good and perfect gift? Can you say that you bring to God the sacrifice of thanksgiving if you remain as silent as a fish, and your lips do not utter His praises?

And when should we bring unto the Lord this sacrifice of thanksgiving with the lips? The answer is always. Does not David say in Psalm 34:1, ***I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth?***

Does not the Psalmist say, *I will extol You, my God, O King; And I will bless Your name forever and ever.* ² *Every day I will bless You, And I will praise Your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless You, And I will praise Your name forever and ever.*²

And, *Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul!* ² *While I live I will praise the LORD; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being?*³

Not a day passes in which the voice of thanksgiving should not proceed from our mouth, and as we are commanded to pray without ceasing, so is it God's will that always and continually we bring to Him the sacrifice of thanksgiving with our lips.

But there are special times and occasions when our duty to thank our God and to praise Him is impressed upon us with a special emphasis. Such a time and occasion for special thanksgiving is our Harvest Thanksgiving Day. Following an established custom we give thanks to God for the fruits of the Land.

But not only that, we give thanks to God for our work, and every other blessing in our country.

We bring to God the sacrifice of thanksgiving, praising and thanking Him for the various blessings which in the past year He has bestowed on our land. We bring to God the sacrifice of thanksgiving with the voice, to show forth His praises with our lips.

However, if our thanksgiving is nothing more than a work of the lips, it would be a vain service. We would then have to class ourselves with those of whom the Lord says, in Matthew 15:8, ⁸ *'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me.*

Our thanksgiving must proceed from the heart if it is to be a sacrifice which is pleasing to the Lord. Our hearts must be filled with thankfulness, with gratitude toward our merciful God, and then, from the abundance of the heart, the mouth must speak.

But what do we find in our heart as it is by nature? Is our heart filled with thankfulness to God? No; by nature the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth, and he never thinks of thanking God for His blessings.

To be imbued with a due sense of thankfulness, our natural heart must undergo a radical change. Our inclinations, our sentiments must be changed. We must be converted from the power of Satan to the living God. We must be made new creatures, whose delight is in God, and whose affections are set on the things that are above.

Faith, true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, must enter into our soul. Then thankfulness to God will fill our hearts and manifest itself not only with the voice of thanksgiving which is made with the lips, but also in deeds, actions, as the Prophet Jonah says, *I will pay what I have vowed*.

Jonah is telling us that his deed will follow the promise, that after his deliverance he would not forget and neglect the vow which he had vowed in the deep to offer unto God a sacrifice and burnt offering, but that he would pay it, and thus show his thankfulness by deed.

And how do we show by our deeds our thankfulness which proceeds from the heart and is expressed with the lips? We do it, in general, by leading a life upon this earth which is conforming to our Christian calling.

Show your thankfulness to the Lord, my dear Christian friends, by your acts in this world, by denying yourselves, and taking upon yourselves the cross of Christ, by abstaining from the world's evil lusts, and by proving in your general behaviour that you are not of this world, although you be in the world, but that your citizenship is in heaven.

Show your thankfulness to God by striving to do His will and walking according to the Ten commandments, by worshipping Him, hearing the preaching of His Word, going to the holy Sacrament, working for His kingdom, supporting His cause, and by doing good to the neighbour as to his soul and body, helping him that he might get to the knowledge of the truth, come to the faith, and be saved, and providing for him to the best of your ability when he is in need.

This is the sacrifice of thanksgiving brought unto the Lord by word and deed.

2. What The Sacrifice Of Thanksgiving is For.

And now, in the second place, let us consider what this sacrifice of thanksgiving is for.

The Prophet says, “*Salvation is of the LORD.*” How wonderfully he was being kept alive in the belly of the fish! This was a miracle without a parallel, and the Prophet experienced that with God nothing is impossible. He acknowledged that to the Lord he owed his salvation, and that Him alone and no one else he had to thank for his deliverance.

And what must we thank God for? What are the blessings that call for praise and thanks on our part especially on Harvest Thanksgiving Day?

They are of two kinds, temporal and spiritual. As to the temporal blessings which God bestowed on our land in the past year, we must admit that salvation is of the Lord. God has not dealt with us after our sins nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. God has not poured out upon us the vials of His wrath which we have deserved.

We have been spared, and that His judgements did not come upon us by which He shows to the nations of the earth that He is God. We have not been punished to the extent of our sins.

It is true that there were local disasters by fire and flood and storm. The crops also in some sections of the country suffered from drought and floods, and the fields did not produce as much as in other years. But how much heavier would the hand of our God have been upon us, had He dealt with us according to our sins!

The temporal blessings which we enjoy by far outweigh the disasters and calamities we had to endure. While in other countries commerce and trade are run down and many workers are idle and can find nothing to do to support themselves and their families, we still have the opportunity to work.

While in other lands, some of the crops have proved a failure, and not enough was harvested to meet the demands of their local market, we have had an abundant harvest in our land, so that millions of tonnes of grain can be exported to foreign lands.

And as to spiritual blessings which we enjoy in our country, we have all the reasons in the world to thank the Lord, our God, and to say with Jonah, *Salvation is of the LORD.*

The greatest spiritual blessing of our land is religious freedom, so that we can worship God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and that there is no state church to be upheld and supported by taxes levied upon the citizens. We know what a blessing religious freedom is.

Our fathers, who left their native land, and came to this country because they were harassed and persecuted in the old country for the reason that their conscience would not permit them to remain in the state church, have taught us how highly to value this inestimable blessing of religious freedom.

But many different organisations been continually at work in our land for years to rob us of this gem and jewel, to wipe out religious freedom, to mix up church and state.

Let us thank God that to this day their efforts have been in vain, and that this blessing of religious freedom has not been taken from us! Here we must praise God and say with the Prophet, *Salvation is of the LORD*.

Another special spiritual blessing which we Lutherans enjoy in our land is, that we have the pure doctrine of God's Word as it has been handed down to us by our fathers in the confessions of our church.

We know that our Lutheran doctrine is true and correct because it is the plain doctrine of the Bible, and nothing else. O how we should thank God for this blessing! Remember to thank God that you we born in, or received into, the Church of God's pure Word and Sacraments.

Why were we not lost in the barren fields of unbelief, or gathered into the fold of a church with false doctrine? Surely, this is not of our deserving, but grace, grace from the Lord. Here again we must say with the Prophet, *Salvation is of the LORD*.

Thanks be to our God, therefore, for all the blessings bestowed on us and on our land in the past year! Let us praise the Lord as written in Ephesians 1:3, *³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.*

Let us close with the words of the psalmist, *¹Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.*⁴ Amen.

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

¹ References to Jonah in the NT.

Matthew 12:40, ⁴⁰ For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Luke 11:30, ³⁰ For as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so also the Son of Man will be to this generation. (See Luke 11:29-32)

² Psalm 145:1-3

³ Psalm 146:1-2

⁴ Psalm 107:1