

## **Intro**

When was the first thanksgiving? April 30, 1598 in El Paso, Texas. A group of 500 led by Juan de Oñate thought they would die before discovering the Rio Grande. This discovery saved their lives so they had a meal with a religious component (mass?) and gave thanks to God.

On Dec 4, 1619, at Berkeley Plantation at the James River in Virginia 38 English settlers, Pilgrims and Puritans, held a religious celebration requiring "that the day of our ships arrival at the place assigned ... in the land of Virginia shall be yearly and perpetually kept holy as a day of thanksgiving to Almighty God." Protestant celebration.

In Nov, 1621, prompted by a good harvest, 52 Pilgrims and approximately 50 Native Americans held a feast and celebrated the goodness of God. Protestant celebration.

On Nov 26, 1789, George Washington declared a day of "public thanksgiving and prayer" devoted to "the service of that great and glorious Being who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be."

On the last Thursday in November, 1863, Lincoln issued a proclamation requesting that all Americans ask God to "commend to his tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife" and to "heal the wounds of the nation."

The common denominator is thanks to God. Thanks for preservation of life, thanks for food provided, thanks for benevolence, thanks for his tender care. In other words, God's character and works.

This morning we'll learn that...

**BIG IDEA: God's character and works call for joyful response**

**READ PASSAGE**

**PRAY**

## **Body**

### **Passage Focus**

A Psalm of praise rooted in God's character and works. The congregation gave thanks as a body when they gathered together. Three responses to God's character and works: **reflection, thanks, obedience**.

### **Point 1: God's character and works call for reflection**

#### **Explanation**

The praise is rooted in what is known to be true about God.

#### **Studied (111:2)**

*Great are the works of the LORD, studied by all who delight in them.* – 111:2

Study = inquiry and investigation.

What's studied? God's works. The passage hints at several of God's works: rescuing Israel from Egypt, preserving Israel during the wilderness, dispossessing the nations and giving Israel the promised land, giving the Old Covenant.

Who studies? People who delight in God's acts. In other words, all believers. The assumption is, if you're a believer, you study the acts of God. Not just elders/pastors. Not just small group leaders. The Psalmist assumes all believers study what God's done.

### **Illustration**

- delight drives study
- the art lover...fascination and delight drives their study, acquisition, etc.
- the World War II enthusiast

Study = the act of discovering the actions of God recorded in the Bible. Recording what God's done. Reflecting on what these acts say God's power and ability. Reflecting on what these acts say about God's character. Putting all his acts together to get a sense of who he is.

### **Remembered (111:4)**

*He has caused his wondrous works to be remembered; the LORD is gracious and merciful.* – 111:4

We have a tendency to forget. So memory retention matters. That's why the Old Covenant established memorials like the Passover, which recalled God's rescue of Israel from slavery in Egypt. If they forgot, they would turn to idols.

Gracious = heartfelt response to one in need...generosity or mercy because one wants to do so, not because of the worthiness of the one in need...inclination to respond favorable to cries for help/mercy.

Merciful = gut-level, emotional sympathy (e.g., mother for a child)...mercy for the helpless that arises from deep love.

Memorials given (to remember God's past acts) = acts of grace and mercy. The gift of the Lord's Supper is an act of mercy and grace!

### **Has shown us something (111:6)**

*He has shown his people the power of his works, in giving them the inheritance of the nations.* – 111:6

God's works reveal God's power. Israel's possession of the promised land being proof. God promised Israel the land and he brought them into it (Josh 21:43-45).

God gave the nations into Israel's hand (Deut 7:24; Josh 6:2; 8:1; 10:8, 30; 11:6, 8) and struck down kings (Ps 135:10-12) and fought for Israel (Josh 10:42). He hardened enemies so that they would oppose Israel (Deut 2:30; Josh 11:20), made walls fall (Josh 6:20), dropped stones on enemy forces (Josh 10:11), made the nations afraid of Israel (Deut 2:25), and sent enemy forces into confusion (Deut 7:23; Josh 10:10).

God really intervenes in human affairs. He really acts for his people. He really accomplishes his purposes. He can't be stopped.

## Application

Study God's works. Remember God's works. Consider what God has shown about himself. How might we reflect on God's works and character?

Do what I did with the accounts of God bringing Israel into the promised land. What did God do? List his acts. Why did God do these things?

*Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations the LORD your God is driving them out from before you, and that he may confirm the word that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. – Deut 9:5*

The text clarifies what possession of the land didn't mean. God didn't bring Israel into the land because of their merit. The text then notes two reasons why God did what he did. First, God was acting in judgment on the sins of these nations. Second, God was keeping promises made.

What does this one verse say about God?

- 1) God punishes sin
- 2) blesses the underserving (Israel did nothing to merit the land)
- 3) God keeps his promises

Does this pattern sound familiar?

God's works reflect his character. God's character is reflected in his works. The two are intimately connected. Everything God does flows from who God is.

Study, remembering, considering what's been shown = centering our thoughts on God himself.

Christianity is God-centered. Our hope is God, not circumstances, not self. Our delight is God, not circumstances, not self. We celebrate God, not circumstances, not self. God himself is the source of our joy. The one who delights in God's works studies them (111:2). Turning our eyes to God, not ourselves, not our circumstances, yields joy that endures the toils of life.

God is infinite. He won't fail to satisfy. Pleasures like sports or hunting or vacations or home decorating will run dry. These can't satisfy our souls because they're finite. They're limited in the pleasure they can provide. God is an unending reservoir of delight that never runs dry! Our hearts were made to praise him!

## Point 2: God's character and works call for thanks

### Explanation

*Praise the LORD! I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart, in the company of the upright, in the congregation. – 111:1*

Thanks is rooted in God's works. Thanks requires study. Thanks is a matter of the heart ("with my whole heart"). The heart steeped in the study of God's works is filled with thanks. **Study produces thanks.**

"God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him." – John Piper

Studying God yields satisfaction in God. Delight in God. An overflow of thanks and praise.

*Full of splendor and majesty is his work, and his righteousness endures forever. – 111:3*

Splendor = glory, honor

Majesty = an activity worthy of royalty

Splendor and majesty together speak of God's acts as shining brightly, radiant, magnificent, worthy of honor.

Righteousness = conformity to an ethical standard, just conduct

God's beautiful, magnificent works reflect his just nature. The point? God's acts point to his beauty and call for praise and thanksgiving.

*He provides food for those who fear him; he remembers his covenant forever. – 111:5*

*He sent redemption to his people; he has commanded his covenant forever. Holy and awesome is his name! – 111:9*

Redemption sent speaks of Israel's exodus from Egypt. The exodus reflects God's nature is to rescue. Through mighty acts, God rescued Israel from slavery. The Old Covenant followed the exodus. Formal relationship entered through covenant. Obligations are placed on Israel. Conformity will result in blessing. Rebellion will result in covenant curses. God commits himself to Israel and obligates himself to respond to them in a certain way. One of the blessings of obedience was crop success. Provision demands praise and thanks.

The exodus reflects God's awesomeness. The plagues on Egypt. Dividing the waters at the Red Sea. Giving Israel dry ground to escape on. Bringing the waters upon Egypt when they pursued Israel. Holy in repaying Egypt for their mistreatment of Israel. Awesome judgments created astonishment and reverence.

### **Application**

When we saturate our thoughts with reflection on God's works, and the character that stands behind those works, we're left with praise and thanks.

### **How this works**

Something happens that's unexpected, discouraged, baffling, beyond my control.

Eyes off of me.

Eyes off of my circumstances.

Eyes on truth. God's truth.

Meditating on what I know to be true of God (died for me, is present with me today, is grieved by my suffering, mindful of me, able to act in my situation) = God deals well with me even if I don't understand why. God has acted for me and he'll never abandon me.

### **New Covenant**

The Psalmist gave thanks for the Old Covenant. We give thanks for the New Covenant. The Old Covenant was ratified with the blood of oxen (Exod 24:5-8). The New Covenant was ratified with the blood of Christ. In the New Covenant, God's dealings with Israel are repeated:

- 1) God punishes sin (on the cross God punished Jesus...treated him as if he lived our life...if we trust in Jesus' death and resurrection, God treats us as if we lived Jesus' life...substitutionary atonement!)

- 2) God blesses the underserving (those who repent and believe receive eternal life instead of the everlasting punishment they deserve)
- 3) God keeps his promises (the prophets spoke of a servant who would suffer in the place of God's people...the day of the LORD spoke of sins being remembered no more, the curse lifted, God dwelling with his people...Jesus' resurrection is the first fruits of our resurrection on that day)

*Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God. – Ps 42:11*

What do we do when we're downcast? We hope in God. What stirs hope in God? Reflecting on his character and works. We speak truth to ourselves when our thoughts are saturated with God. We speak truth to one another when our thoughts are saturated with God. One way we comfort the downcast is reflecting on God's character and works together in song. Why congregational singing? Reflection on God's works and character yields joy and thanksgiving.

Thanks might be lacking because there's no reflection!

### **Point 3: God's character and works call for obedience**

#### **Explanation**

*The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy; <sup>8</sup> they are established forever and ever, to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness. – 111:7-8*

God's works reflect his character: they're faithful and just. Given God's character, his commands/instruction (precepts) must be trustworthy. Dependable. True.

Trust results in obedience. We're faithful because we trust God is faithful. Trust drives joy. Trust drives thanksgiving. Trust drives obedience.

We study God's character and works which produces delight in God which produces whole-hearted obedience. This is how Christianity works. Knowing God = delight in God = faithfulness to God.

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever! – 111:10*

Fear results in wisdom. Wisdom being the skillful application of truth. Obedience yields understanding. It all starts with fearing God.

#### **Fear**

If we trust God's promises we don't fear rejection. Because he's promised all who repent and believe forgiveness of sins. We trust Jesus died for our sins (past, present, and future). We trust our sins will be remembered no more. We believe we're declared righteous, not guilty because Jesus suffered as our substitute. Believing in Jesus' promise of eternal life, we're not afraid of the day of the LORD.

Fearing God for the believer speaks of a reverence, respect. Fear of pride. Fear of hardening our hearts. Fear of the consequences of sin in this life. Fear of God's discipline. Fear of dishonoring God with our conduct. Fear of hindering the church's witness. But not fear of God's rejection.

Fearing God = peace with God and a desire to obey God.

Fear is a function of trust. We only fear because we trust. We trust what God says about himself and how he deals with us. We trust what God says about sin. Fearing God, we don't treat sin casually.

It's through faith-driven fear that we obey God.

### **How does fear lead to wisdom?**

Willful rebellion against what's known to be true (or twisting Scripture to suit our sin) restricts understanding. The person who repeatedly refuses to bow before God's law opens themselves to delusion (Rom 1:21-28). God gives people over to their own folly. Rebellion restricts knowledge.

### **Illustration**

Think a rebellious child. They reject a parent's command. At the beginning they feel guilt. But they keep doing it. Maybe they justify their rebellion. Other kids are allowed to do this. Maybe they just want what they want. As they keep rebelling, they become more comfortable in their rebellion against God (honoring parents is God's command). When new truths come to them they don't understand because they've already trained their hearts to reject truth. They can't see because they don't want to see. They want to do what they want to do and the truth bounces off of them.

Wisdom comes to those willing to obey. Rebellion yields blindness. Obedience yields eyes to see. This is true for Christians, not just non-Christians. We're capable of blind spots. In these blind spots (e.g., harsh speech to a spouse or friend) we hinder ourselves from acquiring wisdom because we've determined our actions are acceptable when they're not. We won't learn a better way until we embrace correction. Understanding comes to those who embrace God's correction. Study needs to be connected with fear!

### **Conclusion**

#### **God's character and works call for joyful response.**

First, the response of **reflection**. Meditate deeply on God's character and works.

Second, the response of **thanks**. Praise God for his character and works.

Third, the response of **obedience**. Fear the one whose character and works are worthy of your trust.