

PSALM 100.4: THANK GOD

A little girl was going to a party and her mother told her to be a good girl and to remember, when she was leaving, to thank her hostess. When she arrived home the mother asked if she had thanked her hostess and the little girl replied: *“No, the girl in front of me did and the lady said, ‘Don’t mention it’ – and so I didn’t”*

Today I want to encourage you to thank God – to thank God for all his goodness to you over another year.

Caroline & I, for instance, thank God that this year we have been able to celebrate 40 years of married life together. At the party we held to celebrate our Ruby Wedding, I thanked God for good friends, great parents, supportive children, two delightful grandchildren, and a loving & capable wife.

What are you grateful for? For what do you give thanks this morning/afternoon?

Listen to the words of the Psalmist found in Psalm 100.4: **“Enter the temple gates with thanksgiving, go into its courts with praise. Give thanks to him and praise him”**.

Or, if the Psalmist had been alive today, he would have said: ‘When you come to worship at Central Baptist Church on a Sunday, be grateful to God – thank him for his goodness – praise him for what he has done’.

Or quote Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase: *“Enter with the password: ‘Thank you!’”*

Why should we thank God and praise him?

Because as the Psalmist goes on to say in the very next verse **“The Lord is good; his love is eternal and his faithfulness lasts for ever”** (v5).

Do notice, that the Psalmist does not say: ‘Thank God for his occasional acts of kindness’ – but thank him for his continuing acts of kindness.

“His love is eternal and his faithfulness lasts for ever”

There is no end to God’s love; God is always there for us.

All too often we blame God for when things go wrong.

In fact we should be thanking God for all the things which go right.

In preparing this short address I read these words in a commentary on this Psalm:

“The two great mottoes of radical monotheism are: ‘I am the Lord thy God; thou shalt have no other gods before me’, and ‘Whatever is, is good’. The second can be said because the source of all things and the power by which they exist is good” (James Mays 320 drawing upon Richard Niebuhr)

The fact is that all of us have cause to be grateful to God.

We only have to reflect upon the year that is past and we will see that he has blessed us time and again.

Henry Ward Beecher, a famous American preacher at the beginning of the last century, put it this way:

“If one should give me a dish of sand and tell me there were particles of iron in it, I might look for them with my eyes, and search for them with my clumsy fingers, and be unable to detect them; but let me take a magnet and sweep through it, and how would it draw itself the almost invisible particles by the mere power of attraction! The unthankful heart, like my finger in the sand, discovers no mercies; but let the thankful heart sweep through the day, and as the magnet finds the iron, so it will find in every hour some heavenly blessings; only the iron in God’s sand is gold”.

But can we really thank God when everything has gone wrong in our lives? When, for instance, has died and our world has changed. Can we thank him then?

I believe that even then we can thank him. We can thank God that even in the darkness he was there, sustaining, strengthening, and giving us hope.

As part of my preparation for this sermon, I dipped into a little book by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the great German Christian executed by Hitler in 1944.

The book was entitled *My Soul Finds Rest in God Alone*, and it consists of a series of ‘Reflections on the Psalms’.

The reflection on Psalm 100 consists of a short letter to a group of theological students written on Advent Sunday 1942. He began:

“My dear brothers, at the beginning of this letter, which is to awaken you to the right kind of joy in serious times, we must list those who have been killed since last I wrote”.

He then went on to list the names of eight of their friends who had been killed..

In this context of sadness and loss, he wrote:

“Joy dwells in God and comes from him, possessing spirit, soul and body. Once this joy has grasped a person, it carries him away, it throws open the closed doors. There is a joy that knows nothing of the heart’s pain or need or anxiety; but it does not last, it can only drug one for a moment. The joy of God has been through the poverty of the manger and the affliction of the cross; therefore it is indestructible, irrefutable. It does not deny affliction when it is there, but it finds in the very midst of distress that God is there; it does not argue that sin is not grievous, but in that very place of sin is found forgiveness; it looks death in the face and it is just there that it finds life. It alone is credible, it alone helps and heals”.

He then quotes Psalm 100.4 **“Enter the temple gates with thanksgiving, go into his courts with praise”**. Here is proof that even in the darkest of times, we can thank God.

Yes, in good times we can thank God for his goodness, but also in tough times.

In May 1974 the great American jazz composer & bandleader Duke Ellington sent a Christmas card to his friends.

He knew that he was dying and that he would not be around to greet them at Christmas. On the front of the blue he had written by hand the words: *Merry Christmas... Happy New Year... Love’.*

Inside the card were printed some verses he himself had composed:

*I don't light a lamp to see the Sun
Don't need proof of GOD
Because I know that there ain't
A-gonna be but ONE.*

*The silliest thing ever read,
Was that somebody said,
'GOD' is dead'.
The mere mention of the first word
Automatically eliminates
The second and the third.*

*Something 'bout believing that's greater than please
Something 'bout believing that's more than treasure,
Something 'bout believing that's beyond measure,
GOD ALMIGHTY*

At every stage of our living there is reason to thank God.

So “**give thanks to him and praise him**”

Or to quote Eugene Peterson's paraphrase again: “*On your feet now – applaud God...
For God is... all-generous in love, loyal always and ever*”