

**MOVING ON TO MATURITY**  
*Getting Ready for Thanksgiving*  
Hebrews 13:15

**Introduction**

What are you doing for Thanksgiving? I've been asked that question many times this week—when I got my hair cut, when I've called people on the phone, when I saw some of you in the hallway. Let me ask you, "What are you doing for Thanksgiving?" And, if you are going to someone's house to share a meal, "What are you bringing?" Whenever there is a family feast, Miriam gets recruited to bring the pies because—this may be a little known fact, but it is true—Miriam is the best pie baker in the world. When I told our five-year-old grandson that, he replied with wide eyes, "Really?!" Yes, I believe it is true, really.

But no matter what you or I are bringing to add to our celebrations of Thanksgiving Day, there is one wish I have for each of us this year: May you bring a sacrifice of praise to your Thanksgiving celebration. **Celebrate Thanksgiving with Praise.**

As we move through our year-long series in the book of Hebrews we come, appropriately this Thanksgiving Week, to Hebrews 13:15, "*Through him, then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.*"

Today we will take a closer look at this verse to enter into this "sacrifice of praise" not just on Thursday, but today and habitually all year long. Four truths about praise are embodied in this one verse.

1. The path of praise is through Christ.
2. The practice of praise is continually.
3. The price of praise is sacrificial.
4. The proclamation of praise is public.

**1. The path of praise is through Christ.**

*"Through him, then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God."*

To whom is "him" referring? Jesus, of course. In fact, the NIV actually fills in the pronoun with the name, "Jesus." Around churches and within sermons, the answer is always "Jesus." A kindergarten class was being asked a question by the teacher, "What is brown and climbs trees?" The students seemed puzzled. "Well," continued the teacher, "What is brown, climbs trees, and gathers nuts?" One five year old boy finally put up his hand, "I know the answer is 'Jesus' but it sure sounds like a squirrel to me."

Well in our text of Hebrews 13:15 the answer is "Jesus" as the context makes clear.

According to 13:12, "Jesus suffered outside the city gate to make the people—us—holy through his own blood." The sin offering of the Old Covenant was, according to Leviticus 4, to be burned outside the camp. And the scapegoat bearing away the sins of the people was, according to Leviticus 16, to be released outside the gate of the camp. So also, it was no coincidence that Golgotha was outside the gates of Jerusalem. It was there, outside the gate, God arranged as a perfect parallel that Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, would be sacrificed as our sin offering, our scapegoat bearing away our sin.

As the book of Hebrews stresses and reiterates, Jesus is our high priest. He paid for our redemption with his death. He bought our atonement with his blood. He offers forgiveness by his grace. And, once we have received God's redemption, atonement, and forgiveness, we have access to the throne of God, to which we can come with our petitions (Heb. 4:16) and our praises (Heb. 13:15).

Friends, I do not know where each of you stands with God. But I truly know this: the only way to God is through his Son, our Savior. If you have received a relationship with God through Christ by grace through faith, then you have a clear path through which you come to God with your petitions and your praises. The path of praise is through Christ. **Celebrate Thanksgiving with Praise.**

## **2. The practice of praise is continually.**

It is expected we will be praising God while experiencing fulfillment. Charles Spurgeon wrote, "Praise is the rent God charges for the use of his mercies." And it is good to praise the Lord when he "has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons and provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy (Acts 14:17)."

But we are to praise God "continually" which means, of course, we are to praise him also not just while experiencing fulfillment but also while enduring frustration. 1 Thessalonians 5:18, "In everything give thanks." Looking toward God in faith, we can give thanks for everything, knowing He's got the whole world in his hand. Nothing touches us or our loved ones without first being filtered by his good hand of Providence. In that sense, then we can give thanks for all things.

But the Bible also indicates there is a time and place when our perspective is looking toward the sin or the sorrow, and then it is proper to be angry and grieve. "Who is led into sin," Paul writes to the Corinthians, "without my intense concern (2 Cor. 11:29)?" And when we are focusing on and ministering to the one suffering we respond with sorrow. Romans 12:15 instructs us to "rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep."

What makes our support ineffective is when we get these points mixed up. We should be identifying by anger with someone who has been abused, or grieving with someone who has been abandoned. At that time we don't cheerfully chortle, "In everything give thanks!" No, we get angry at the sin; we identify with the pain. Then by faith we look toward God and remind ourselves He has a plan and a purpose. By faith we "give thanks to Him" for how he will work all things for good.

Yes, we are to bring a sacrifice of praise continually. We by faith affirm the Composer of the universe and Musician of our soul, is able to weave haunting melodies into our lives, even in the minor key. We know he will in due time—in this world or the next—modulate the A flat minor key into G major to his praise.

For now, though, the practice of praise is continual, while experiencing fulfillment and while enduring frustration. **Celebrate Thanksgiving with Praise.**

### **3. The price of praise is sacrificial.**

Praise is called here a sacrifice. Perhaps the author, writing to Christians who were Jewish—hence the title of the book, Hebrews—wants to argue against their desire to go back to the Old Covenant sacrificial system. He says here, “No, God is pleased as we present just these two sacrifices: the sacrifice of praise (vs. 15) and the sacrifice of doing good and sharing (vs. 16).”

But there is a price involved in the sacrifice of praise. The first cost we might encounter is the cost of our preoccupation. Luke 17 illustrates how preoccupation can get in the way of thanksgiving. Jesus was traveling between Samaria and Galilee when he encountered ten lepers yelling out “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!” He instructed them, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” The reason Jesus sent them to the priest was Lev. 14:1-32. That passage gives detailed instructions for how the priests were to examine any person who had been healed of leprosy before re-introducing them back into their family and society. And as these ten lepers were going in faith and obedience, they were healed. At that point, they became pre-occupied. The faster they showed themselves to the priests, the faster they could rejoin their families. Nine lepers hurried, pre-occupied, to the priest, but one stopped and returned to pay the price of praise. Sometimes we are so pre-occupied enjoying what God has given us—our health, our families, our careers—that we don’t take time to turn back to thank him.

A second price of praise is our pride. “*What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not (1 Cor. 4:7)?*” We do not thank people for that which we have coming, that we have a right to expect. We do thank people for benefits given to us, that were gifted to us. When it comes to our attitude for the loving kindness and compassion God has poured upon us, we don’t deserve a thing, do we? Yet, he showers us with blessings and benefits, again and again. My pride takes a beating when I say “Thanks.” I did not deserve what you, God, have given me.

Let’s carve out time today and Thursday to thank God, paying the price of praise with the coin of preoccupation and pride, so we have less pride and less preoccupation and a lot more praise.

**Celebrate Thanksgiving with Praise.**

### **4. The proclamation of praise is public.**

*“...The fruit of lips that give thanks to his name.”*

Dr. Ron Allen, from whom I studied Hebrew in seminary, says the Hebrew language has no word for “silent thanksgiving.” Giving God thanks cannot be done silently, it had to be public. A good example of outward, public, loud praise is Psalm 108. “*Awake, harp and lyre, I will awaken the dawn. I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples. For great is your love, higher than the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens, and let your glory be over all the earth.*”

Our praise should sometimes be over the top. It should be so loud, it might be said, poetically speaking of courses, to “awaken the dawn.” We are so quiet. Respectable. Full of decorum. There is a time and place for contented sighs. But there is also a time and place for exuberant shouts of praise. Most Sundays we have the opportunity to proclaim public praise together musically. What an elixir for the soul that can be!

But also, from time to time, we can put our praise into words of testimony. Maybe in your Life Group or Sunday School class. Or, sometimes even in our corporate worship service. Like today. We have reserved time today to allow you to briefly demonstrate the proclamation of praise is public.

To do so, let's formulate our praise on this Thanksgiving Week around Psalm 103.

[Omit: "*Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name.*"]

*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits.*" How can we "bless" the Creator?

How can the inferior 'bless' the superior. This verse says we are to bless God. By not forgetting his benefits to us. We bless God when we do not forget his benefits. We bless God when we render to God thanks for what he has granted to us.]

Four categories of benefits are specifically mentioned in Psalm 103. Later in our service, you will have to opportunity to share with public proclamation how God has come through for you in one of these four ways listed in Ps. 103: 3-5:

- The Lord pardons all your iniquities  
*Your sins are forgiven.*
- The Lord heals all your diseases  
*Your diseases are healed.*
- The Lord redeems your life from the pit  
*Your life is spared from death.*
- The Lord crowns you with loving kindness and compassion  
*Goodness is poured out on you.*

Too often, we inscribe the memories of our blessings in sand and the recollection of our grievances in granite. There is a therapy in thanksgiving. To the believer, thanksgiving is a poultice applied to emotional infections, drawing out the poison of bitterness.

### **Conclusion**

This week, beginning today, let's get ready for Thanksgiving. Knowing...

1. The path of praise is through Christ—he is the priest who has suffered outside the city to grant us access to God.
2. The practice of praise is continually—whether we are experiencing fulfillment or enduring frustration.
3. The price of praise is sacrificial—it costs us our preoccupation and our pride.
4. The proclamation of praise is public—contentment may be internal, but praise must burst out.

What are you doing for Thanksgiving? What are you bringing? Well, among the pumpkin pies and roasted turkey, the candied yams and black olives, remember to bring the most important part of Thanksgiving. Let us bring a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips that give thanks to his name.

**Celebrate Thanksgiving with praise.**