

Mary Craig Ministries, Inc.



Message: "The Thanks-Giving Connection"

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In times past it has been easy to regard relationship with the Living God as a mere observance of outward ceremonies. Going to church, singing songs, seeing people baptized, taking communion, bringing offerings—all these can become nothing more than rites and rituals, the performing of duties without truly connecting with God or with God's people. Today, that is being challenged, stripped, and will no longer suffice. God wants more. You and I need more lest we cast dishonor upon the name of God. Today, God is calling us to true spiritual worship, to prayer and praise, to connect with thanksgiving.

The Mighty One, God the LORD, Has spoken and called the earth from the rising of the sun to its going down. Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God will shine forth. Our God shall come, and shall not keep silent; A fire shall devour before Him, And it shall be very tempestuous all around Him. (Psalm 50:1-3 NKJV)

In Psalm 50:4-11, God calls to the heavens and the earth that He may judge His people. Those that have made a covenant with Him by sacrifice must gather to hear what He will testify against them. True holiness has been despised and the pure worship of God corrupted. God desires mercy and not sacrifice. (Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:7) He is not indebted to man because of any sacrifices or offerings made. He requires neither food nor drink. His possessions are boundless. Rather, He communicates life to all as the self-existent One.

We tend to form our estimate and image of God from humanity, from ourselves, from our fathers, and/or from our experiences. This leads to carnal worship, and to a proud view that somehow we benefit God by our services. (Isaiah 66:1, 2) The world had a beginning, but God is from eternity. In Himself there is sufficiency, so He says:

If I were hungry, I would not tell you: for the world is mine, and the fullness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer unto God Thanksgiving; and pay your vows unto the Most High: And call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me. (Psalm 50:12-15)

We just seem to have a propensity for perverting true worship. It's easy for us to become addicted to ceremonies. We like tradition and repetition because it makes life easier, more predictable—even with the One, true God. We really would like a checklist so that we could see "how we're doing" and be able to boast about our fabulously victorious Christian life. But God doesn't allow it.

Rather, we are called to acknowledge God as the Author of all our mercies and to ascribe to Him His just praise. Days of trouble are assumed, and in such days we are to walk with a trust that calls on a God we know to be good, true, pure, and holy. We are to seek by prayer that deliverance which the only true God can give, and render the appropriate thanks.

The psalmist sets praise and prayer in opposition to ceremonies and mere external observances of religion to lead us to a holiness of life and heart, the true sacrifices which please the Most High.

In paying our vows, we are reminded of Psalm 116:12, 13: *"What shall I render unto the LORD for all His benefits towards me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD."*

God is Spirit. We worship Him in spirit and in truth. Outward rites may confirm our faith by representing truth, but these should lead us to call upon the name of the Lord with a pure heart. God's eyes are not blinded by those seeking to shelter impurity of heart and life under a veil of outward services and rituals. Such obtrude themselves into the presence of God, hoping to deceive Him with vain inventions and strange fire. Yet this "form of godliness" unaccompanied by the grace of faith and repentance abuses the name of God and becomes sacrilege.

It is the wicked who hate instruction and cast God's words behind them. They consent with the actions of thieves, partake with adulterers, give their mouth to evil, and frame deceit with their tongue. They speak against their brothers and slander those of their own family. They forget God. But what does God desire? (Psalm 50:16-22)

But to the wicked God says: "What *right* have you to declare My statutes, Or take My covenant in your mouth, Seeing you hate instruction And cast My words behind you?"

When you saw a thief, you consented with him, And have been a partaker with adulterers. You give your mouth to evil, And your tongue frames deceit. You sit *and* speak against your brother; You slander your own mother's son. These *things* you have done, and I kept silent; You thought that I was altogether like you. But I will rebuke you, And set *them* in order before your eyes. (Psalm 50:16-21 NKJV)

God desires us to connect to Him and to one another through thanksgiving. The ties of nature are not to be violated, but strengthened. In forgetting God, we display base ingratitude, yet God extends the hope of mercy even to the most corrupt of humanity, i.e., those who profane His worship, mock His forbearance, and abandon themselves to scandalous crimes.

Now consider this, you who forget God, Lest I tear *you* in pieces, And *there be* none to deliver: Whoever offers praise glorifies Me; And to him who orders *his* conduct *aright* I will show the salvation of God. (Psalm 50:22, 23 NKJV)

God is only to be approached by those who seek Him with a sincere heart and in an upright manner. This is only possible as we look to and receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, trusting in His Blood and righteousness, being justified freely by God's grace.

For Christ also has once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit. (1 Peter 3:18)

Thanksgiving honors God (Psalm 50:23). God commands it. (Psalm 50:14) Failing to give thanks is as much as forgetting God. (Psalm 50:22; Romans 1:21) Thanksgiving acknowledges the grace and goodness of God, safeguarding us from pride and arrogance. If we're not thankful, we grumble, grow bitter, and curse rather than bless.

It is a time to give thanks, to connect through giving thanks. We can do this privately, like Daniel (2:23; 6:10) or publicly (Psalms 11, 22, 35). We can offer thanksgiving for others (1 Timothy 2:1) and for God's goodness to the nations (1 Chronicles 16:7-36).

As we call upon God's Name, sing to Him, seek Him, remember His mighty works of creation and redemption, remember His covenant and our covenant blessings, we ascribe to God His

glory, character, and worth. We make His name known among all peoples and join with all nature and the heavenly host in worship. Through thanksgiving we connect with God and with others. It just breaks down the barriers of bitterness and hatred and pride. Looking at each other, we may deem one higher or better or holier than another. But looking at God, we are humbled and seek Him to save us all.

Lots of times over the years I have been asked, "What's there to be thankful for?" It gets like that. Right now it's a time of clouds, and some of those clouds are dark clouds with few silver linings. But God's glory is also connected with a cloud, and Jesus is coming with clouds with great power and glory. Actually, we have a lot for which thanks can be given. So, let's just say, "Every believer can give thanks to God by remembering and praising Him for the following demonstrations of His Being:

1. God's wondrous works of creation: (Psalm 9:1; Isaiah 25:1; Psalms 136, 139; Romans 1:21)
2. God's wondrous works of redemption: (Exodus 15; Psalms 18, 30, 86, 118; Isaiah 12:1, 4; Colossians 1:12)
3. God's wondrous works in others: (Psalm 109; 1 Thessalonians 1:2; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; Ephesians 1:16; Colossians 1:3)
4. God's gifts to us: (Daniel 2:23; 2 Corinthians 9:10, 12; Ephesians 1:2; Psalm 19; Psalm 119; Psalm 104, e.g.)
5. God's attributes and character: (Psalms 28, 100, 107; Jeremiah 33:11; Daniel 6:10; Psalm 103, e.g.)
6. God's revelation and wisdom, which delivers us from affliction: (Psalm 119; Daniel 2:17-23; Exodus 15; Psalm 73; James 1:1, 2; Psalm 35; Psalm 79, e.g.)
7. God's unspeakable gift, even Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord: (Luke 2:38; Revelation 4, 7, 11; 1 Timothy 1:12-17; 2 Corinthians 9; John 3:16)"

One time I was speaking with some children in India. They wondered why America was so blessed as a nation. I told them I believed America was so blessed as a nation because we are a nation that gives. So many in America understand that the foundation of all giving is love and goodness. It begins with God's goodness and love. God's goodness prevails under His ownership. Giving enables thanksgiving to God. People praise God when people give to one another. It connects us together and to Him.

Despite efforts to cancel America's culture and destroy us at our roots, and strip away our rights by proud hollow men stuffed with straw, many Americans continue to reach out to those in need everywhere. Because America gives, America will continue to be blessed. Though it has been declared a secular nation needing its history re-written, America is still a nation under the sovereignty of the Living and True God. Despite supply shortages and inflation taxes, Americans still openly pray, "God bless America." In a few days, America will take a day off as a nation to give thanks to God for His bounty and grace. As wells run dry, more people will bow their heads in humility and look not to the cisterns made by human hands but to the Source of all Life and Blessing.

The transforming effect of God's gift of grace to us in Jesus Christ is such that we can now give. God's forgiveness of our sin through Christ who was sent by the Father to save a people for Himself, restores through reconciliation our relationship to the Living God. While we were these selfish little sinners, deserving of wrath, ingrates and greedy, proud and rebellious, hating and snarling at our Creator, God in Christ gave all of Himself that we might connect with Him by means of a covenant, the blood covenant of Jesus Christ. We receive the free gift of eternal life, connecting through our praise and prayers. He seeks those who will worship Him in spirit and in

truth. He is the “hound of heaven” who pursues us and doesn’t give up. Jesus poured out His life for us to make this connection, this bond that cannot be broken. God’s love is pure, true, without a lie, powerful and penetrating every wall of resistance. His loving us changes everything. We love because He first loved us with an everlasting love that does not abandon, does not disappoint, and does not fail.

Thus He heals us, and takers become givers. We give in His name, for His glory, and by His grace that others might connect to God and one another through giving thanks.

This Thanksgiving, let’s seek to connect to God and to those around us by giving thanks to God and by giving that causes others to give thanks unto God.

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