

## **“THINKING ABOUT THANKING.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

**November 28, 2024, 10:00 AM**

**Text for the Sermon: Psalm 77:11-15**

### **Prayer:**

Holy Father, feed us from the feast of your Word, before we go to feast from the bounty of your blessings. Increase in us our capacity to receive spiritual food and drink. Enlighten the eyes of our hearts, make us to be a most thankful people for your glory, for you are the one from whom comes every good and perfect gift.

### **Introduction.**

Let me do a quick hand poll, how many of you enjoy reading books about history? How many of you enjoy watching the History Channel? How about biographies or autobiographies?

I want to make a recommendation to all of you this morning to read one particular historical autobiography. I can guarantee it would be a huge benefit and blessing to everyone. It is the same historical autobiography that Asaph referred to in Psalm 77. It is your own historical spiritual autobiography. You should re-read it over and over again.

One of the greatest benefits of doing this is when you get in a dark or discouraging season. It enables to go back and remember in the dark what you saw in the light.

That is the situation Asaph the author of Psalm 77 finds himself in. Asaph was a prominent Levite singer, poet, and prophet who led worship under King David and King Solomon. King David had assigned him to give thanks to the Lord and minister before the ark of the covenant (1 Chronicles 6:7, 37). But in this psalm Asaph has lost his way, we is adrift without any anchor and the Psalm begins with disturbed and grief-stricken cries to God.

Asaph is a Levite, he is spiritual leader, he is a leader in the worship of the one, true, holy God of Israel, of Yahweh. What a high and holy calling. Yet Asaph is human, he is flesh like us. He is in what he calls a day of trouble. He is crying out and moaning to God, his soul refuses to be comforted, he is so trouble he can't speak.

And then the lowest point of all.

**Psalm 77:7-9** “Will the Lord spurn forever, and never again be favorable?

8 Has his steadfast love forever ceased? Are his promises at an end for all time?

9 Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his compassion?”

He dares to accuse God of things that are spiritually and theologically false. He accuses God of being a rejecting God, a tired God, a stingy God, a forgetful God and an angry God. He is lower than a snake's belly in a wagon rut.

These are the words of a man having a crisis of faith. His confidence is so shaken, he is confused and losing sleep, in his anguished spiritual wrestling.

We don't know what the darkness is and I think it's good when Scripture leaves it vague. It allows us in whatever darkness we are in to enter in. The darkness could be sin, depression, anxiety, stress, fear, doubt, oppression, under attack from enemies or worse yet from friends, overwhelming circumstances, any or all of the above.

The point is he is spiraling out of control, circling the drain and losing perspective. He is calling aloud to God but feels like he isn't being heard.

Asaph is wallowing in self-doubt and self-pity, perhaps even anger or bitterness, he feels sorry for himself and wonders why God isn't doing something about it. And as is common in such people he exaggerates and accuses. He pines for the old days when things were better. But then when he thinks of the past, he only remembers the negative.

In verse 10 he comes to his senses enough to make a plan, there is something he can do, one thing.

**Psalm 77:10** Then I said, "I will appeal to this, to the years of the right hand of the Most High."

This is the astonishing pivot point of the Psalm. Given how low he was, this is stunning how high he reaches. The second half of the Psalm is an entirely different mood or tone, a total 180.

I will remember what I have forgotten. I will recall to my mind what I have neglected. I will ponder and meditate on the mighty works and deeds of God from his past and from of old in Israel's past.

Notice the verbs remember, ponder and mediate, meaning to call to mind and reflect.

Then notice the four nouns that are the object of this attentiveness, deeds of the Lord, wonders of old, your work and your mighty deeds.

Now notice something else, well OK you can't because I didn't print the earlier verses. The same verbs were all in the first half of the Psalm, but the nouns were different. He had been remembering and meditating on his troubles. He had been thinking about the wrong things.

This huge sea change comes when he focused his prayers not on himself and his problems but on God and His works and His deeds. His thinking begins to turn to thanks.

Asaph decides to start reading the spiritual autobiography of God's people. We can name this. The title of this history is *Hesed-History*, the history of God's steadfast love and covenant kindness that endures forever.

Out of all of God's deeds and works and wonders he selects one to mention, the exodus of the children of God through the *Red Sea*, the most dramatic act of redemption, the most spectacular display of God's glory and power and grace and mercy.

That singular event in Israel's history was a constant reminder that their small trials and trouble are nothing compared to what insurmountable obstacle stood in the way of Israel's deliverance. He saw the water, saw God and was afraid, the deep trembled.

Do you think your troubles tremble before the living God? Of course they do, everything trembles before God, nothing can hold back His arm. He is mighty to save.

Everyone of us has a *Hesed-History* with two chapters. Everyone of us should be able to recount God's wonders and works in Scripture. Creation, the promise after the fall, the Red Sea, the Promised Land, the prophetic promises and then their fulfillment in Christ, the incarnation, the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. Pentecost. The Church on earth, the sacraments, God's written Word preserved and handed down.

But you have your own personal Hesed-History, your own Red Sea where God rescued and delivered you from the bondage of your own sin. This chapter includes your own seismic spiritual events where God intervened, or preserved, or protected or delivered or provided in miraculous ways. Those things that when you think about them you cannot help but give thanks. Those things that when you think about them turn your dark nights into hope. You should write them down, recount them to your children and grandchildren.

If you don't like where you are, then start praying and thinking about thanking. Start thinking and remembering and meditating and reflecting and pondering and mulling over in your mind on the works and deeds and wonders of God, both in history, in salvation history but also in our own history and in our own salvation. Look where the hand of God has touched your life, where His grace has been abounding, where His mercies have been great.

If you like reading history, there is no more beneficial and spiritually rich history that you can read than the history of your own life and what God has been to you and doing for you from the beginning of your life to now.

Look for the manifestations and outpourings of His mercy, faithfulness and love that there have been in all the situations you have passed through. If your hearts do not melt before you have gone half through that history, then I fear your heart may have grown cold.

As I have shared before I keep on my computer an ongoing journal of the history of events, activities and providences in my life. I include in it details of those events, I include where I

have seen the kindness of God, the provision of God, the protection of God, the countless graces of God. I notice those places where the distance between heaven and earth became thin and the manifestation of His presence was palpable. (our three calls to three churches so providential)

Countless times I have read through my history and reviewed the providences of God's mercy, grace and goodness and each time drink again fresh sweetness out of them as I see the hand of the living God again and again moving and working. All the details help me savor the glory and goodness again and again. (God's particular and unique providence in three church calls)

Push away discouragement and disappointment with thinking about thanking and all you have to be thankful for, which by the way is everything, because there is nothing that we have that we have not received from the Father above.

In his crisis of faith, Asaph had to remember God's faithfulness in the past to keep his faith in God's promised future grace from failing in the present — or in his words, to keep his foot from slipping (Psalm 73:2). (Jon Bloom)

Someone has said, thanks are the highest form of thought. The highest form of thinking is to be thankful and live gratefully.

Thanks and gratitude are what we owe God for all we have been given and received from Him. His grace is abundant, abounding, overflowing. There is never a day without grace.

Consider for a moment the spirit of negativity that pervades our land and our own souls. There is a crisis of gratitude. We are no different than the children of Israel wandering in hard times in the wilderness, grumbling, complaining, murmuring against leaders, murmuring against circumstances. Focusing on the half empty glass, on what we don't have.

The antidote to the poison of negativity is remembering with thanksgiving the deeds of the Lord.

Thanksgiving Day is a day set aside to reminisce, to reflect, to meditate, to muse, to ponder, to remember who God is and what He has done and to give thanks for who He is and all He has done.

Thanksgiving Day is a tremendous gift. It allows most people to have a day off, to gather with families, and to make space in our lives to remember and give thanks.

Our memory is like a muscle, it has to be exercised or it will get flabby and forgetful. We exercise it by thinking and remembering and reminiscing and meditating on the grace of God. Begin and end each day remembering and thinking about giving thanks for three things. Cultivation the habit of thinking about thanking.

## **Conclusion.**

So now, today is a feast day, a holy day set apart to delight in the God whose steadfast love endures forever.

To all of you I say, go to your homes, gather with friends and family, be filled with good food and more filled with thanksgiving. Fill this day and week with outbursts of thanks to God, thanks for life and health and strength, thanks for your spouse, parents, children, relationships, employment, provisions, possessions, church, all His good gifts that are all an expression of His hesed for us.

And most of all, above all else, for Jesus who is the hesed of God and our forgiveness and salvation, for the Gospel of His great grace, for the Holy Spirit and the Word of God and His church and eternal life. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift.

**Prayer:** Holy Father, I pray that you would awaken in all of our hearts a greater longing to magnify you at every opportunity. Give us grateful hearts that glorify you and the greatness of your goodness and grace and glory. Most of all make us thankful that as good as this life is, it is not all there is and the best is yet to come. And now for all we have received and all we are about to receive, make us truly thankful, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Now let me remind you of what I say each year before we sing this closing hymn so that you will sing us with heartfelt understanding.

Now Thank We All Our God, was written by pastor Martin Rinkart in 1636 during a pandemic in his city. Over 8,500 people died including his own wife. As the only surviving pastor, in one year he did over 4,400 funerals, on some days he did services for 40-50 people. Notice there is not a hint of “woe is me” in the words, only grace and gratitude, even in the darkest of times. May we all give thanks to our God in the same spirit of gratitude, because the steadfast love of the Lord endures forever.