

The Joy of Belonging to God

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[0 : 00] Well, I want you, well, I was going to say to cast your minds back. Maybe some of you cast! your minds forward. Some of you cast your minds back a few years. Some of you, maybe a lot of years.

You're 10 years old. You're 10 years old. It's a week or so after Christmas. The presents, haven't they? They've been kind of filtered into two piles. There's the definitely sticking around category and then there's the one and done category. You know, good for 20 minutes on Christmas Day but I'm never going to use you again. And the first day back at school is looming large on the calendar and you are wondering how to make the best use of your last few days of freedom when your mum calls you to the kitchen table. You dutifully arrive hoping there is maybe some food and offer. But instead, right, there is a piece of paper. And on that piece of paper is a list of all the presents you got for Christmas. And next to that list of all the presents you got for Christmas is an equally long list of names. Grandparents, cousins, uncles, aunties, great-aunties, great-uncles, and a whole lot of other people you're pretty sure you've never met in your life.

And ominously stacked next to this little bit of paper is a pile of cards. We know, don't we, that it is good to give thanks.

But it doesn't always come naturally, does it? Sometimes we need to be told, encouraged, to give thanks. Sometimes we need to be reminded of what we have received. Sometimes we need to be reminded of where it has come from. Sometimes we need to be told how to say thank you.

Enter Psalm 100. A psalm with the unique superscription there of being a psalm for giving thanks.

[2 : 19] This is what this well-known and well-loved psalm is all about. Commanding us to come. Come and give thanks to the Lord. Showing us how to do it. Reminding us of what we have been given and pointing us boldly to the generous gift giver. Lots of psalms specify certain occasions on which they are to be sung. But this psalm has no such constraints.

It is a psalm of thanksgiving for all occasions and for all people. There are two parts, verse 1 to 3, and then verse 4 and 5. Each of those parts call us to give thanks through three imperatives, that is kind of commands, doing words, and then gives us reason for that thanksgiving. So we're just going to begin by walking through those two sections. Verse 1 to 3, first of all, where we are called to give thanks to the Lord, for we are His.

Give thanks to the Lord, for we are His. And you'll see there in verse 1 and 2 that the psalm begins with a kind of a triple imperative, right? Make a joyful noise. Serve the Lord. Come into His presence.

That is what thanksgiving looks like before God. Joyfully serving the Lord as we come to sing in His presence. We've heard already, haven't we, a couple of weeks back, that the call in Psalm 98 to sing.

To sing loudly, to sing joyfully. These opening lines reiterate that call. It is noise, right? Joyful noise.

[4 : 21] Not just singing in your heart, but causing the airwaves around you to vibrate with praise. And that joyful noise should reflect a glad heart. Serve the Lord with gladness.

Again, the word for serving there can mean sort of service, as we normally think of it, or it can mean worship. Worship. I think we can take the two of them together, can we? Serving Him every day with a smile on your face, gathering for worship every Sunday with gladness in your heart. Come into His presence singing songs of great joy. That is what Psalm 100 instructs us to do. And the question, of course, isn't it, is why? And we do need that answer, don't we?

We can force ourselves to sing. We can force ourselves even perhaps to serve, even if we don't know the basis of our singing or serving. We can force our actions, but we cannot, can we, force our emotions. We cannot concoct joy and gladness from thin air. We are called to gladness and joyful

noise, but there's nothing more frustrating, is there, when you're, you know, when you're kind of feeling down, you're having a bad day, and someone kind of comes up and says to you, why don't you just cheer up? Like, wouldn't that be better? As if it were the answer to all your problems, and it was just a case of, oh yeah, silly me, right, I forgot to be happy.

Actions can be forced, emotions cannot. And yet here we are commanded to be joyful and glad. So we do need to know why, and knowing why starts with knowing God.

Know that the Lord, he is God. At first, that might sound like a little more than kind of poetic repetition, but remember who the Lord that there in capital letters is. We've seen this a few times already throughout the series.

[6 : 44] This is, like, this is the covenant Lord who chose to enter into a relationship with and wholly commit himself to his covenant people. Like, four times through this short psalm, the psalm of the psalmist wants us to remember that the one we joyfully worship is the one who has said, I will be your God, and you will be my people.

And our Lord, he is God. Omnipotent, omnipresent. Again, remember that the context that these psalms are coming in, they're all flowing, aren't they, from the back of Psalm 89, with the destruction of Jerusalem and the subsequent exile that God's people faced.

They were living in hard times. But this is yet another reminder that the God of Israel is the only God.

The Lord, he is God. Your God, our God, really is for us. He has committed himself to us. He really is in control of all things.

That in itself, isn't it? His cause for joyful thanks, no matter the present situation we find ourselves in. Because even when we are confounded by our circumstances, God, the one God, is our God.

[8 : 18] And he is for us. So we can come gladly and joyfully as we know him. And we can come with even greater joy and gladness as we know what he has done for us, what he has given to us.

The reason that those presents are kind of all listed on that piece of paper is so that we would know, so that we'd be reminded of the good that has been done, in order to rightly respond in thankfulness.

But that is what the psalmist does here in the rest of verse 3, where he just sort of begins to write a few big ticket items at the top of an infinitely long list of all that God has done for us.

It is he who made us. We are his. We are his people. I think the psalmist is giving us kind of two layers there of what it means to be his.

And why that is so good, so joyful. First, he is our creator, isn't he? He is the one who formed our inner parts, who knitted us together in our mother's womb, who made our frames and knew every one of our days when as yet there were none of them.

[9 : 51] We rightly, don't we, we rightly thank people who make us dinner, who send us a card, who invite us into their home.

We give them thanks, and so we should. That is good. That is a great thing to do. The Lord, your God, has given you your life.

It is a gift that he has placed into your hands. As Paul says to the Athenians in Acts 17, he himself, that is God, gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

In him we live and move and have our being. How thankful would you be to a doctor who performed life-saving surgery?

How thankful would you be to perhaps to someone who pulled you out of the roads when a bus was coming your way? Those are times when we say to the person who has saved our life, we say, I can never thank you enough.

[11 : 08] I could never thank you enough for what you have done for me. What do we say to God, who not only preserves our life, but gives us life?

It is a gift from him to you. You and I, we would not exist if it were not for him. A lack of thankfulness always stems, doesn't it, from, or perhaps a combination of ungratefulness and forgetfulness.

I'm in the early stages of fatherhood, so I've not really experienced this from the perspective of a parent, but I was once a child. When so much is regularly given to you, it becomes very easy, doesn't it, to take it for granted.

And so when we are children, we are rarely, are we? Maybe we're a better child than I was. But we are rarely overflowing with thankfulness constantly to our parents.

Because we just presume on what they give us. We write thank you cards, don't we, for people, because we have made a list of who have given us what.

[12:26] What would it look like if a child was to make a list of all that their parents had given them? It would be a lot of pages, wouldn't it?

A home to live in, food to eat, clothes to wear, toys to play with, lifts to school, holidays paid for. You could go on and on and on and on and on and on and on.

But so often it's the case, isn't it, that when it is always there, we are very quick to overlook it. I think part of the wonder, the beauty of what Psalm 100 is doing is it is pointing us to the obvious.

So that we would not take for granted the incredible gift that has been given to us. He made us. And we are his.

All that we have belongs to him. All that we have is given into our hands by his goodness. We have nothing apart from him, from life itself to all the blessings besides.

[13:32] How long would the list be if we made a note of everything God has given us? It is kind of, isn't it, that the most basic theology, the most foundational knowledge of God as creator, that alone should leave us with hearts bursting forth with thankful praise.

That, I think, is partly, right, why this Psalm is addressed to everyone. Make a joyful noise to the Lord. All the earth. All the earth.

But we'll come back to that in a little while. But for here, right, we should see, shouldn't we, there is no one. There is no one who should not be thanking God, for there is no one who has not been made by God.

But not only did God make us in our humanity, he also made us, us here this evening with our faith put firmly in the Lord Jesus Christ, he made us his people.

The sheep of his pasture. What made the Israelites God's people in the Old Testament was, it was not their righteousness, it was not their greatness, it was not anything about themselves.

[14:51] As Moses writes it in Deuteronomy, It was not because you were more in number than any other people, that the Lord set his love on you and chose you. For you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the Lord loves you.

That covenant relationship between God and his people that he has wholly committed himself to, it was established by him alone, through the gracious work of his hands, whether in calling Abraham to himself, in bringing the Israelites out of Egypt, God's people are God's people only by God's work.

He made us, and he made us his. He made us informing our being. He made us his own through his gracious work in history.

And he keeps us, doesn't he? He keeps us as a shepherd keeps his sheep. He makes us, he calls us, he cares for us. A shepherd does not let his flock go unfed.

He protects them, doesn't he, when enemies approach. When his sheep go astray, he corrects their course. When his sheep go afar, he chases after them. They are safe and secure, not because of what they do, but because of what the shepherd does for them.

[16:14] We are the sheep of his pasture, the Lord's pasture, the Lord who is God. The list of gifts is not only long, every item on it is of immeasurable worth.

If you tried to return these gifts, there would not be enough money in the world to cover a fraction of the cost. It is the most precious thing ever given. And so we should respond with the greatest joy and thankfulness that this world has ever seen.

I think we can say that if you do not feel joy, if you do not know gladness as you come and worship God, you need to know once more who he is and what he has done for you.

If your worship feels flat, maybe it is because your understanding of God has grown thin. So the psalmist says, doesn't he, know him.

Know him. Come and know him, and soon you will burst forth with songs of praise, making a joyful noise. So give thanks to the Lord, for we are his.

[17:32] And secondly, we are to give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. He is good. Verse four there commands us to further thanksgiving through another three imperatives.

Enter his gates, give thanks, bless his name. In many ways, this is just re-emphasizing what was said a few verses ago, but in these verses, I think, right, that the highlight marker was just kind of there underlining the object of our joyful worship.

Enter his gates and his courts, giving thanks to him and blessing his name.

Worship is all about God. We don't come for our sake, but for his. Again, it would be crazy, wouldn't it? It would be crazy to ride a thank you card to someone, but only in the hope that you might get something in return.

That's not thankfulness at all, is it? Thanksgiving, true thankfulness, turns our attention wholly away from ourselves and towards the giver.

[18:47] And here, we are given further reason to give him thanks. Verse 5, for the Lord is good. The Lord is good.

His steadfast love endures forever and his faithfulness to all generations. Verse 3 draws our attention to who we are because of God.

Verse 5 focuses simply on who God is in himself. And what he is, is good. He is so good that there can be no bad in him.

It is perfect goodness. And we have, don't we, that goodness highlighted for us in two ways. His steadfast love endures forever. His faithfulness to all generations.

This is chesed love. Right? That the loyal covenant love of God that never lets go. It never lets go.

[19:53] There was never a time when God did not love us. There never will be a time that he does not love us in the same way. It is constant. It is unchanging. I mean, our love can so easily wobble and wane, can't it?

but never so with God. His goodness is such that his love never ceases. It never reduces.

Just as God himself never changes, so too with his love the same yesterday, today, and forever.

That is joyful news, isn't it?

when our love for him can be so changeable to know that his love for us is not. God does not love you depending on how well you are loving him.

It is unchangeable, unshakable, covenantal love that endures forever. forever. It is, it's actually the kind of the foreverness of God's love and his faithfulness that the Hebrew text really highlights in these verses.

[21:07] His love is like a river that never runs dry, flowing and flowing and flowing. And just as his love is like a river that never stops flowing, his faithfulness is like a rock that will never be moved.

He never lets go and he never changes. His promises are unshakable, his goodness extends to every generation.

He is more consistent than the rising of the sun. He is more dependable than the tide to the sea. He is more immovable than the mountains. He endures longer than the stars in the sky.

His love and his faithfulness are forever and to every generation from before the beginning to beyond the end.

He is good always. That is who he is and that is who he is to us, to you and me.

[22:14] So once more we are beckoned to come into his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise for he is forever good.

That is who he is. That is who he was to God's covenant people of old. For them that his steadfast love was the same yesterday, today and forever.

His faithfulness did endure to all generations. That this was a psalm. That God's covenant people even in exile that they really and truly could sing wholeheartedly.

They could own every word as their own without any element of mystery. But what glowed warmly in the old covenant now shines like the sun.

In Christ Jesus these wonderful truths they do not change but they are now blindingly beautiful.

[23:28] For in Christ we see what it truly means for God to be our shepherds. For us to be the sheep of his pasture.

not only our maker and sustainer but our redeemer and our savior. For the good shepherds who was the good shepherd? The good shepherd the Lord Jesus Christ was the one who would lay down his life for his sheep.

He gives us life by laying down his own. He makes us his through the shedding of his blood. So when we sing of being the sheep of his pasture.

It is no more true than it was then but can you see how we can take these words on our lips with hearts overflowing with thankfulness. With even more joyful singing.

With even more exuberant praise. We come and sing this psalm as the sheep of Christ's pasture.

And we sing this psalm with the infinite goodness of God revealed with even greater clarity to us in his son.

[24 : 43] For God's love was so great it was so great that even while we were still sinners Christ died for us. It was in love steadfast love that God predestined us for adoption in Christ Jesus.

He chose us in him before the foundation of the world. God did you hear what that means as we sing of his forever steadfast love?

Not only lasting in eternity but beginning before the beginning of time there was no beginning.

There was never a time when God had not set his love on you in Christ Jesus.

Before you were a cell in your mother's womb God loved you in his son with the very same love that would cause him to lay down his life for you before you were God loved.

It is forever from before to beyond the end. It is forever and it is for everyone. We read earlier from Revelation 7 when great multitudes will come before the throne of God worshiping him day and night never hungering never thirsting but instead following and serving and worshiping the lamb who will be their shepherd steadfast love from before the beginning of time that will last for eternity and is for all peoples the great multitude where did they come from the one that no one could number from all tribes and all peoples and all languages all people that on earth do dwell singing to the lord with cheerful voice because of the lamb who was slain again the exiles could sing this psalm with the hope of something beyond their wildest dreams somewhere in the distant future we can sing this psalm seeing that hope become reality amongst us in our world as we gather together on a

[27 : 04] Sunday people from all nations people from all backgrounds coming and professing their faith in the lord jesus christ giving thanks to god we are watching this glorious call really go out to all peoples when you see margo and kevin and wendy and sarah and roddy and daniel coming up here and professing their faith in the lord jesus christ we are seeing aren't we jesus reaching out to all the earth all the earth doesn't that make you want to sing for joy to the lord for he is good his steadfast love ensures forever and his faithfulness to all generations to all people he is god and he is good in jesus we see the good shepherd laying down his life for his sheep and for the sheep that are not yet part of his fold so shall we come shall we come and sing a joyful song to the lord shall we make a joyful noise to the lord who is god and who is good whose steadfast love endures forever whose faithfulness extends to all generations and all people let us come and give joyful thanks for we are his and he is good let us pray before we sing these wonderful words to god's praise together father we thank you and praise you that you have made us and that you have made us your own through the blood of your son jesus christ our good shepherds lord we praise you that this is good news for all peoples for all who come to him who put their faith and trust in him from every nation tribe and language lord we rejoice that we see your goodness in your steadfast love and faithfulness made known to the ends of the earth in jesus christ in him we in his name we pray amen