Worship the Lord with Gladness

Psalm 100

Key Verse: 100:2 “Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.”

The harvest season has come. Thanksgiving Day is coming up. It is time for us to be joyful and thankful. In fact, we have more things to be thankful about than things to complain about this year. Paul said, “Be joyful always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances: for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (1 Thes 5:16-18)

In today’s passage the Psalmist praises the Lord, especially as he comes to the Lord to worship Him. He remembers God’s covenant relationship with his people and his unfailing love for them. He teaches us why we have to be thankful to God and what kind of attitude we should have when we come to Him.

Let us read verses 1-2, and 4. “***Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs…Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.***” The words in these verses teach us what kind of attitudes our God wants us to have before him - “joy, gladness, joyful, thanksgiving, and praise” All these words teach us about God’s divine character, which is goodness. Some people misunderstand our God. They think our God is strict, angry, merciless, judgmental, exclusive, and cruel. It is true that our God is holy and righteous. He judges evil and punishes our sins. But our God is good, gracious, merciful, compassionate, and faithful. Our God is also joyful. Have you ever heard that our God is joyful? What did God say after each day when he created all things in the beginning? He said, “*It is good*!” He said in the sixth day, “*It is very good*!” God was so joyful when he saw all things made beautiful and wonderful. God also planted the Garden of Eden for man’s happiness. The word “Eden” means “joy” or “happiness”. Our God is joyful. He is a joyful God. He enjoys being joyful, as we all do. He likes us to shout for joy to him. (1) He likes to hear our joyful songs. He wants us to worship him with gladness. A few days ago, I heard someone singing in my house. It was not my wife or my daughter, because they were out at that time. It was my son Sam, who was humming and singing. I was so joyful to hear his singing, even though I don’t remember what he was singing. Our joyful song cheers our God. Our thankful hymn pleases Him. Our God is joyful and happy to hear our joyful shouts and thankful hymns. Let us sing to the Lord!

When we come to our church, we must bring thankful minds as our offering. Verse 4 says, “*Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name*.” When people enter the door of church, they bring many mixed feelings and emotions. Some are grumpy. Others are upset, and still others anxious. But I believe that we all bring our thankful minds and joyful spirits to the Lord today.

In verses 3 and 5 the psalmist teaches us several reasons why we have to worship the Lord with gladness and bring our thankful mind to Him.

First, the Lord is our God. (3) Let us read verse 3. “***Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture***.” It is not too much to emphasize the importance of knowing God. This is because when we know that the Lord is God, we know who we are. Last week we studied ‘identity’ through Bible symposiums - “Who are we?”, “Who am I?”, “Where did I come from?”, “Where do I belong to?”, “What is the purpose of my life?” and so on. Indeed, knowing the meaning and purpose of our existence is the most essential and significant task for all human beings. In the book “Roots”, the author Alex Haley traveled to Gambia Africa many times in order to find out who his ancestors were. Before I became a Christian, I also stayed on the top of the mountain for three full days in order to find out who I am and where I came from. But the Bible says that we came from God and we are his people. We are his because we came from him and are going back to him. We belong to him and we are his children. Pastor Mike Dotson said in the symposium that our earthly identity is changeable and conditional according to our profession, school, nationality, and so on. If you teach at school, your identity is a school teacher. If you work at a hospital, you will have an ID from your hospital. If you study at Wash U., you are a Wash U. student. If you transfer to SLU, you will have a SLU student ID. But our heavenly identity which came from God never changes. It is eternal. We are the children of God and heavenly citizens.

Know that the Lord is God. God is our Lord and our true King. He is our true object of worship and love. When we know him, we know who we are because we came from him. He made us. He deserves our worship, praise, and admiration. There is no other king for us but God alone. Amen!

The Bible often describes that God is our shepherd and we are his sheep. King David said in Psalm 23, “*The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters*…” A shepherd is the overseer of sheep. He feeds and takes care of his sheep. A shepherd also protects his sheep from thieves and animals. King David understood the role of a shepherd very well because he was a shepherd before he became a king. He fought against wild beasts such as lions and bears in order to protect his sheep. After he became a king, he shepherded his people with justice and love. He took care of his people as God did for him.

We are thankful because the Lord is our shepherd and he takes care of us in the time of our suffering. David said, “*Even though I walk through the valley of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me*.” (Ps 23:4) When do you feel that you are walking through the valley of death? Students may feel this way when they failed their test. Some may feel this way when their relationships with others are broken. Still others walk in the darkness when they lose their job, health, or something else. Remember that our Lord never leaves us to be alone. He is always with us and with you and me. He will guide us, protect us, and lead us to the right way. David finished his psalm in this, “*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*” (Ps 23:5-6) Amen.

A shepherd knows his sheep. Jesus said in John 10:14, “*I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.*” Jesus knows who I am. Jesus knows who you are. This is because he is our shepherd and our maker. He knows our deep thoughts, inner desires, and interests. He knows what we need even before we come to pray. Psalm 139:2-3,13-14 says, “*You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways… For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.*” Amen!

Second, the Lord is good and his love endures forever. Let us read verse 5a. “***For the Lord is good and his love endures forever.***” Men are good and evil. We sometimes are good and sometimes are evil. But the Lord God is always good. This is because goodness is his unchangeable character. In all things the Lord works for the good of those who love him because his character is always good. (Ro 8:28) The Bible says there is no darkness in him at all. (1Jn 1:5) He is always joyful and always good. How many times did God say, “It was good” in Genesis 1? In Genesis chapter 2 the author didn’t say “It is bad for the man to be alone.” Rather, he said, “It is not good for the man to be alone.” (Ge 2:18) There is no word ‘bad’ or ‘wrong’ or ‘evil’ in the Lord.

Do you know how the Lord has been good to you and to your family this year? You may feel sorry to God when your situation didn’t seem to get better. You may have some complaining spirit because God didn’t answer your prayer as you wished. But let’s think harder. Our Lord is good. He always works for good for those who love him. He is able and mighty to change our crisis into opportunity and to turn over our failure into final victory. We think that we failed. But God doesn’t think so. Our good God waits and works in his time in his way in order to give us final victory. For instance, people thought that God failed when Jesus was crucified on the cross by the evil people. People wondered how the good God allowed the innocent and good Jesus to be killed by his enemies. But what happened? God raised Jesus from the dead after fulfilling all his messianic work of salvation. God gave the final victory to Jesus and to all those who belong to him. There is no despair or failure in Jesus. The Lord is good and his love endures forever. Amen!

Third, his faithfulness continues through all generations. Let us read verse 5b. “***his faithfulness continues through all generations.***” The Bible says, “*All men are like grass and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.*” (Is 40:6-8, 1 Pe 1:24,25) If God’s love endures for one generation and that’s it, we have no future. No hope for our children! We have a future because our God is faithful. His love endures forever and his faithfulness continues through all generations. Our God is an eternal God and his love endures forever. Love and faithfulness go together. Our God is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God’s blessing continues to the succeeding generations. God’s covenant was passed on to their next generation. Jesus didn’t die only for those who lived in his days. He died for all generations in the whole world. His redeeming grace will continue for our children and children after their children. The gospel of Jesus Christ will continue to spread even though the world changes and changes. God’s faithfulness goes on and on until our Lord and King Jesus Christ comes again.

In conclusion, we have many reasons to be joyful and thankful. The Lord is our God. He is our good shepherd. He knows us and protects us from all harm and danger. He is faithful. He does not leave us alone. He makes promises and doesn’t change his mind. He is with us. Jesus said, “*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*” (Jn 10:11) Jesus is our shepherd. He loved us and died for us. Let us give thanks to him and praise him. Let us worship him with gladness and praise. Ephesians 5:19,20 says, “*Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*.” Amen.