

On this Thanksgiving Eve, do you need an attitude adjustment? As you think about that, I invite you to bring your burdens to the Lord. “Cast all your care upon him for he cares for you” are words of invitation written by the apostle Peter. Psalm 116 says something similar: “I love you, Lord! You answered my prayers.”

On this Thanksgiving Eve, I encourage you to pray for your needs and the needs of others. Jesus taught us to pray: “Give us this day our daily bread.” Martin Luther notes, “Daily bread includes everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, and so on.” He also says that in praying “give us this day our daily bread,” we are asking God to help us to realize our need and to receive his blessings with thanksgiving.”

On this Thanksgiving Eve, you may hear these things, and even agree that they are true, but you may still feel a void in your life. Do you sense that you are not as thankful as you should be? Do you feel that you are not praising God as much as you should? Do you feel a bit guilty for not appreciating his blessings as much as you should? Now I realize that I just ran through a lot of “shoulds.” But bear with me. Think about where you are on your spiritual journey. You may not be where someone else is. Where are you? Do you sense a need for an attitude adjustment?

If so, I would once again direct your attention to Psalm 116. “I love the Lord, for he heard my voice; He heard my cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live.” When you take a look at the rest of this Psalm you'll find a person who was face to face with his own mortality. Time was running out on him. The Lord delivered him and snatched him from the jaws of death. What about you? Is the meter running on your life? How much time is left?

Is the Psalm writer thankful? You bet he is! Did he conduct a special Thanksgiving service? You bet he did! Look at verses 17 through 19: “I will sacrifice a thank offering to you and call on the name of the Lord. I will fulfill my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people, and the courts of the House of the Lord in your midst, O Jerusalem.”

But what may catch your eye about this Psalm is how it ends. It simply says: “Praise the Lord.” That phrase is so well known in Christian circles as to be almost beyond cliché. It may come across a pat answer to some, or it may strike you as a

verbal placeholder (just words you say that sound spiritual), or for others it may seem like just another thing to cross off the to-do list. But tonight, I am truly hoping we can recover the powerful truth of this phrase. “Praise the Lord.” What these three words tell us is that the Lord is worthy of praise simply for who He is, and you are at your best when you praise God simply for who He is. Or maybe it would be helpful to ask—what is your heart more attached to: the gifts that God gives; or God, the Giver of the gifts?

That may be a distinction you haven’t thought about for a while. But it’s the distinction at the heart of tonight’s very famous gospel lesson, in which Jesus heals ten lepers, but only one returns to thank the One who gave the gift of healing. All ten loved the gift God gave; just one loved God enough to come give personal praise. Our Lord did not withdraw the gift from the nine who just went home; they were not suddenly struck with a recurrence of leprosy; but the One who returned to give thanks had something far better than even physical healing. He had a personal audience with God in the flesh.

This is the real question at the heart of thanksgiving. Do you go to God to get things, or do you go to God to get Him? If you go to God mainly to get things, then your thanksgiving will always be conditional. You’ll thank Him when He does as you ask, but what if he doesn’t? On the other hand, if you go to God mainly to get Him, then not only are you strengthened by your connection with Father, Son and Spirit, but you can enjoy the other gifts appropriately. In His vast generosity, He throws in the other gifts of home and family, career and reputation, as gifts for you to fully enjoy, but they are not the ultimate point of your life. The point of your life is summed up in three words—“Praise the Lord.”

So how do you get there? Well, step one is to think, to think through what you know and what you don’t know. By that I mean, if God is as good and merciful as the Bible says, then He has lifted burdens you don’t even know about. He has met needs you’re not even aware of. He has provided you with blessings that are hidden from your eyes. He’s granted provisions your barely acknowledge. You have some catching up to do. Your praises do not balance out with your petitions for things. And neither do mine.

But let me tell you something else. The balance has been met. The scales are even. Jesus is the one who made sure the praises exceed the needs and demands. He came into this world with the right attitude—and others picked up on it. The angels sang praises at his birth. Shepherds gave him praise. Wise men gave him

praise. Simeon and Anna gave him praise. The lepers, the blind, the disabled, the deaf, the thieves and adulterers and even the dead all gave him praise.

And in perfect obedience to His Father, Jesus walked the thankless road that led to the cross. There, he stretched out holy arms, bowed his head in submission, and gave his life for our sins. He took into himself our ingratitude, our praiselessness, and sacrificed himself. He allowed himself to be treated as if he was the thankless one, so that you could be treated as the one who did all things well. Yes, Jesus' death on the cross balances the scales for you. And, his resurrection from the dead tips the balance in the other direction—you and I receive from him far more good than we merit—in fact, his resurrection pours a power into you that cannot be gained any other way. You and I can stand strong in the face of death itself. Why? I Know That My Redeemer Lives. He lives my mansion to prepare. He lives to bring me safely there.

Do you see why the Lord Jesus deserves the praise? He deserves the praise for who he is. He deserves the praise for what he has done on the timeline we call history to bring us into eternity with him. And when we set our attitude to this truth, when we focus on Jesus' life and death and new life—His resurrection and ascension; his kingly reign and his continual presence in his Church; that is when worship becomes beautiful. That is when the point of our lives becomes clear. And check this out: the point of our present life is the same as our heavenly life: it is to Praise the Lord. You were made for it; you were saved for it; the joy of praise is yours forever.