

Giving Thanks Even When it Hurts
Job 1
For Thanksgiving Day, 2006, by Rev. Keith Davis

Beloved congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ, whenever we read or sing the Psalms, it's always good to ponder the question, *what is the story behind the Psalmist's words? What is the story behind his anthem of praise?*

Was this Psalm born out of a joyful experience; out of a triumphant moment, or was this Psalm born out of great strife, suffering, or sorrow in his life? You'd think you'd be able to tell from the words of the Psalm, but that's not always the case, is it? In fact, in many cases the very Psalms that are born of great sorrow and strife are the ones which sing all the louder of God's goodness, of his loving-kindness and tender mercies.

The same is true when it comes to some of the hymns we have in our Psalter Hymnal. For example, the hymn which we will sing after the sermon, *Now Thank we all our God* also has a story behind it. The author of that hymn was a Lutheran minister by the name of Martin Rinkart.

He was serving a church in the city of Eilenburg, Saxony (Germany). During his time as Pastor, Saxony was engaged in the Thirty Years War (a religious war, but nevertheless very brutal and bloody). The city of Eilenburg was overrun by armies more than once; it also fell victim to famine and plague.

In fact, in 1637 the plague killed an estimated 8,000 people. At one point, all the other ministers had succumbed to famine or plague and Rinkart was the last surviving pastor. He performed as many as 50 funerals a day!

Rinkart survived to see the end of the Thirty Years War; when it ended, he wrote *Now Thank We all our God* for a grand celebration service. It was nothing less than a testament to his faith, that, in the aftermath of such incredible sorrow and misery, such terrible hardship and suffering, he was able to write a hymn of abiding trust and praise and gratitude toward God.

Most of you are probably familiar with the words. Stanza one reads:

*Now thank we all our God with heart and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things has done, in whom His world rejoices;
Who, from our mother's arms has blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love and still is ours today.*

The second stanza is a prayer for God's presence and protection; the third stanza is a doxology (*All praise and thanks to God, the Father, now be given*). Reading those words, you'd never guess that this popular thanksgiving song was written in the face of terrible suffering and strife.

Beloved, *that's* the unmistakable mark (sheer power) of true faith, isn't it! And you now what, that same faith, that same power was at work in the heart of God's servant, Job. We know that based upon his own testimony, based upon the very doxology which he sang in verse 21.

Here was a man who in one day endured what was easily the most horrific series of losses anyone has ever been made to endure; yet his response to these losses: *the Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord!* That's giving thanks even when it hurts!

Today we will consider Job's doxology, and from there we will examine our own hearts, and our own lives, to see if our Thanksgiving is driven by the same quality and character of faith as we see here. So we consider God's Servant Gives Thanks in the Face of Great Loss. Notice:

- 1) Job's Fiery Trial;
- 2) Job's Faithful Response.

1) Job's Fiery Trial

People of God, I think you'd agree that it's relatively easy to give thanks when the reasons for thanksgiving are right there in front of our eyes: our spouse, children, our home, our business, our wealth, our health, our nation's prosperity, our personal and spiritual freedom.

But a good question to ask ourselves is this: Do we give thanks to God simply because God is good to us? Or, do we give thanks to God simply because God is good? Let's say for instance that all those good things were suddenly taken away us. Would we still give thanks to God?

That would be a good test to see if our gratitude to God was born out of true faith and love for God, or whether our Thanksgiving was born out of the good things that God gives us. One thing we can be sure of, congregation, Satan knows the sinful tendencies of the human heart.

Satan knows that many people are *religious* for no other reason than what they can get out of it. And as our text bears out, Satan suspects that this is the real reason that Job served God. In verse 6, we're told that Satan stood with the angels who appeared before God.

Now, the fact that angels came before God does not surprise us; angels are God's messengers who do his bidding; they report to their Master. But Satan does not belong there. He once did, but having rebelled against God he was now as a fallen angel, heaven was no longer his domain.

He was cast down to the earth. So Satan doesn't stand as one among the angels; rather, he stands apart from them, distinct from them, which is why God addresses him directly. Keep in mind that this was before the day when Satan was bound, before the day in which he was restricted from coming into the presence of God and bringing accusation against God's people.

Once there, God asks Satan where he has come from. Satan's reply sounds almost innocent and harmless. He's been *roaming through the earth and going back and forth on it*. Yet, Satan's words are fraught with lies and deception and cunning.

This scene is similar to a suspicious parent asking a misbehaving, mischievous child what he has been up to. He says, *Oh, nothing, just doing this and that, just going about here and there*. But the truth is, all along he's been doing nothing but evil all the time. So is it with Satan. His sole desire is to deceive souls; to lead men away from God. Peter says that Satan doesn't innocently roam the earth; rather, he prowls about as a lion looking to devour whom he may!

Now, we might be somewhat puzzled, if not altogether surprised by the Lord's response to Job in verse 8. For, it is the LORD God who draws Satan's attention to righteous Job. The Lord says,

Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.

We wonder, why did the LORD respond to Satan in this manner? There are several possibilities, but the one that fits the text best is this. It's very likely that Satan's "report" *insinuated* that he had been everywhere on the face of God's earth and had not found anyone good or *righteous*.

In other words, Satan was there bringing accusation against all mankind, telling God that none of his image bearers served Him anymore; thus he was living up to (more accurately living *down* to) his reputation as a liar, a mocker, a deceiver, a scoffer of God. Satan was proudly bragging about how he had turned all men on earth against God, so that all men now serve him.

But the God of Truth catches Satan in his lie. The LORD says, "Have you considered my servant Job"? And so the Lord wisely begins to boast about Job; he praises Job before Satan.

In vs. 1 and in vs. 8 we read that Job was a *blameless man* (perfect). That's doesn't mean that Job was without sin and guilt; it only means that his faith in God was counted as righteousness; his heart was upright; he was a man of integrity, not a double-hearted man (not a hypocrite).

He walked before God in holiness and reverence. The text not only show us Job's exalted status, but even his humble character when it reveals that Job was a Godly father, who conducted himself like the priest of his household; he made early morning sacrifices on behalf of each his ten children; he did so in the event that any one of them sinned and cursed God in their hearts.

But God's praising of Job is more than Satan can bear. So Satan responds by accusing Job of being a mercenary. He's faithful only because of the payoff, the benefit. And so he brings accusation against Job. *Does Job fear God for nothing? Isn't it true that you have built a wall of protection around him, his household and every thing he has.*

Isn't it true that you have blessed the work of his hands so that he his flocks and herds are spread out through all the lands. The answer to the latter two questions is *yes*. Of course the

Lord has done that—there's no shame in that. The Lord faithfully visits His blessings upon all those who love Him and walk uprightly before Him.

Nonetheless, it was Satan's contention that if the Lord would remove his hedge of protection and his hand of blessing, then Job would surely curse God to His face. In fact, Satan states his case in the form of an oath, saying *may I be cursed, may I be damned if he doesn't curse you*.

You see what Satan is doing here, don't you? We're reminded of the undefiled Adam, the crown and glory of God's creation, whom Satan targeted and attacked and caused to fall. We see a foreshadowing of God's own Son, Jesus Christ, and Satan's attempt to cause him to fall, to turn away from God His Father.

So here too, Satan is challenging the LORD, saying that he can cause the brightest and best, the most righteous among men to turn against the LORD. As we have discovered in Revelation, Satan desires nothing more than to destroy what God has made and called good.

So what does the LORD do? He permits Satan to tempt Job; the LORD (as he would one day do with David and Peter) allowed Satan to sift Job as wheat. He put everything Job had into Satan's hand; the LORD only stipulated that he could not harm Job himself.

And we know what happens next. Satan went out from the presence of the Lord, eager to bring his evil and mischief to bear on Job's life. And then right away, starting in the next verse, (verse 13), Job's life comes crashing in.

From verses 13-19 we read of four messengers who appear before Job in succession, one right after the other. And as each messenger comes, the news gets progressively worse. First his oxen, his farm animals are stolen and the servants who attended them are killed; next his flocks and their shepherds are destroyed by lightning

Then he receives word that three parties of Chaldeans came and raided the camels and took them off, killing whatever servants were guarding them. And then finally, the most painful news of

all, the news that no doubt cut him to his very soul, a mighty wind struck the house where all his sons and daughters were gathered for a feast; the house collapsed and all of them perished.

Notice, even though our text tells us that God allowed Satan to do what he wanted to Job, it is still the sovereign God himself who brought about the catastrophes in Job's life. When lightning falls from heaven, when a powerful windstorm blows through the desert, those are not forces under Satan's control; even bands of marauders are under God's control.

Realize also, that Job doesn't know why this has happened. He wasn't privy to the Lord's conversation with Satan. In fact, that's the very question that he pursues throughout the rest of the book. He wants to know why this has happened.

Now, there are many people who read the book of Job with skepticism toward God. Even some Christians have been known to get angry at God because He seems so willing to bring catastrophe and tragedy and hardship into Job's life. They accuse God of playing a game with Job's life, of making a wager with the Devil, while Job is the one who has everything to lose.

How could God show such apathy, such indifference, such callousness toward his servant Job and his family? They argue, what's the difference between this God and the mythology of the Greek gods who for entertainment sake would make sport of men's lives.

Here we have to understand who God is, and what His purposes are. God lives and He actively seeks to bring glory and honor and praise to Himself. That is not selfish. God does that because He alone is God and is worthy of all praise! So by allowing this trial and test, God designs to bring glory and honor to His name. In the end, the LORD will shame and defeat Satan.

Also, through this painful, long, and difficult trial, the LORD will also build up and honor His loyal servant Job. That is also what is at work here. Satan believes that these tragedies will surely separate Job from his God. But God says, *NO! It will, in fact, draw Job closer to me!*

And we cannot forget Job's place and role in the history of redemption; we need to realize that by means of these severe trials which God brought into Job's life, He would hold Job up before His people an example of the patience and trust and faithfulness that he required of them.

So let that be a lesson to us, as we encounter our trials and hardships, some which are similar to what Job endured, but many more which are *petty* when compared to his trials. Let's remember that our God is sovereign and supreme.

God does not play games with our lives; God does nothing in this world, He allows nothing to befall us without a consideration for how that event will ultimately bring glory and honor and praise to His great Name, and how that event will eventually edify and build up His own Church.

2) Job's Faithful Response

So that is Job's fiery trial. Let's consider *Job's faithful response*. Vs. 20 records Job's reaction; as you can imagine it is one of total and complete grief. Job is overwhelmed by his sorrow! His heart is sunken and crushed within his chest.

Several of you here know what it is like to lose a grown child; but who here can fathom the grief of losing ten children at once? It's simply unspeakable anguish. But notice how Job conducts himself as a righteous man even in his grief.

Like King Hezekiah, and King David, after him Job tears his robes and shaves his head as a sign of his grief and mourning. Why is that significant? Unlike Job's pagan neighbor's he does not cry out, or writhe around and cut himself with sharp rocks and stones. Even in his hour of grief, even in the midst of great sorrow, pain and tribulation, at a time when no one would really blame him for crying out in desperation or even directing blame against God—yet Job remains faithful!

How much isn't this like our faithful Savior? Think of his hours of anguish and grief; his indescribable *hellish agony* of soul in the Garden Gethsemane and later on the cross; yet, Jesus suffered and endured all that obediently; He was a faithful servant, who, for the sake of our salvation, submitted himself entirely, his will, his emotions, his all to His heavenly Father.

Jesus did not curse God! That same truth is said of Job in verse 22. Job does not sin by charging God with wrong doing. Job does not sin by directing anger against God; worthy to note as well, is that Job does not direct his anger at the bands of marauders who struck down his servants and made away with his livestock and flocks.

He does not speak out in defiance of the lightning that fell from heaven or the mighty wind that struck down the house in which his children were feasting. Yet congregation, how often don't we see that very reaction today? How often don't we see anger, defiance, wrath, and hatred from man as he stands in the midst of fiery trials, as death and tragedy strikes?

In the Middle East, when someone is assassinated, when someone is even accidentally shot and killed, immediately the cry goes up for vengeance and retaliation. When natural disasters strike and cause a great amount of damage and great loss of human life, people are always there to question how God would ever let this happen, or wonder if there really is a God.

We can testify to our own failings in this regard. And sadly, I speak for myself here as well, it seems that it doesn't even take a great trial or a great tragedy before we simply cave in and start blaming God, or directing our anger at Him for our slight loss or for a temporary inconvenience, or for our small set back (that's the way Satan wants us to react, the way he hopes we react!).

Yet here is Job, stripped of all that he holds near and dear, and he doesn't charge God with wrong doing, he doesn't blame it on the band of raiders, or even on "Mother nature". Instead, what does he do?

The end of verse 20 tells us that he fell down in worship before God. Instead of taking an action Satan wanted him to—showing a proud and arrogant defiance of God, Job demonstrated just the opposite virtue. He fell down to the ground in humble submission to God's mysterious will and ways, and the Bible tells us he *worshipped*. He worshipped the LORD His God.

And his act of worship evokes from his heart and thus, his lips, this faithful confession: *Naked I came out of my mother's womb, and naked I will depart (return); The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised!*

No. These are not the words and actions of someone who is merely resigned to his fate, who in his grief simply gives himself over to despair and surrender because he realizes there's nothing he can do about it. That's not the response we see here.

No. This is a response of true faith. This is the response of a child of God who knows and trust his God; this is the response of a man who recognized all along that everything he had, all that he possessed, from the *oxen* in his field, to the *sheep* and *cattle* grazing on the hills, to the *camels* in the stall, to his very own children eating around his table—none of it was his; none of it *belonged* to him!

Job understood that and he believed that from the very beginning. If it were otherwise, beloved, then Job would have charged God with wrong doing; then Job would have proven himself to be a mercenary; and then Satan would have been right.

But Job was every bit of the righteous man that God said he was, and he remained faithful through it all. You know beloved, one of the most powerful and enduring fallacies of life and society is the idea that we people can actually *own things*, or that something belongs to us.

Here in our society, our sense of self-worth, our status is often measured by how much money we make per year, or by what kind of car or SUV we drive, or by how many square feet our house is, or by whether we lives in a gated community or in an upscale neighborhood.

We go so far as to calculate our *net worth* according to what we possess, according to all that we (quote unquote) own minus the debt that we owe. Even our children get into the act, talking about selling something which they *own* and then speaking of how all that money will be *theirs*.

And, yes, while we have the benefit of living in an orderly society, the law does permit us to speak about possessions as *ours*; the law entitles us to own cars and property and homes; we recognize that legally we have the right to sell what we have, and that once we buy something it becomes ours.

Yet in the midst of all this, we also have to acknowledge the truth of what David said in Psalm 24:1: *The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.* The Bible reveals to us a law that is in effect that outweighs every human law, every agreement, that dispels every commonly held fallacy and myth.

The fact is, none of what we “have” is really ours, is it? It all belongs to the Lord. The Lord made the entire universe and everything in it—including us. While God in His kindness sees fit to present these gifts to us for a short while or even longer, the fact is, God still owns everything.

God owns our children. They come as a gift from God, and if and when God sees fit to call one of His children home, be they 9 months, or 9 years old or 19, then He is perfectly free to do so. Think of this, the children that we conceive, that we bring into this world, are only part of our family for a short while—a brief moment.

Whereas they belong to God, as part His Church, His Kingdom, from conception to all eternity! In reality, we parents are raising God’s children. Beyond that, think of this: man is but living in God’s world/universe; we are drinking His water, we are eating His food, we are breathing His air, we are drawing upon His resources, we are living life at His grace, at His allowance.

So who are we to charge God with wrong doing when trials overtake us? Who are we to blame God for hardship or sorrows or strife? Where is our humility? Where is our righteousness? Beloved, the reason God sent His Son to die on the cross for us was so that Christ could make us righteous; it was so that we could stand in the strength He provides; it was so that we could recognize (like Job) that all that we have is but on loan from God. And so it is indeed possible, even for us, to give thanks to God even in the midst of fiery trials, even when it hurts. Amen.