**Sermon- Putting the Giver back into Thanksgiving**

Scripture: 1 Chronicles 16:2-22, 34-36 Sunday, November 26, 2017

I hope you all have had a wonderful Thanksgiving holiday. This is one of my favorite festivals in this country because even though there is something similar celebrated in almost every country around the world, our Thanksgiving celebration has a unique character and origin. You see in most parts of the world, you have a harvest festival that is celebrated once the crop harvest is completed, the barns are filled and there is a period of rest. That is something worth celebrating right? In India because it is a big country with different crop seasons there are 23 different harvest festivals listed in Wikipedia. Europe has 25 harvest festivals. When you cover the Middle East and South East Asia you get another 10 more harvest festivals. So we are talking about 60 harvest festivals around the world. And what is common about these festivals is that there is always a big party, a time for family to gather and sometimes there are parades and a whole bunch of revelry. Most of these harvest festivals have a religious component to them as well because the people celebrating the festival are also trying to thank various gods for giving them a good crop and also trying to appease the gods for next year’s crop. Among those 60 harvest festivals there is one that the Jews would celebrate. The festival called Sukkot of festival of booths that even Jesus celebrated in John chp 7. Sukkot literally refers to tents made of leaves and they have a dual significance. You first find mention of it is Exodus 34:22 where it is says, “You shall observe the festival of weeks, the first fruits of wheat harvest, and the festival of ingathering at the turn of the year”. But later this festival develops in significance and in Lev 23:42-43 you have the festival of booths established with these words. “42 You shall live in booths for seven days; all that are citizens in Israel shall live in booths, 43 so that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.”

So the harvest festival began to be called the festival of booths because at harvest time the harvesters would actually go out and live in these make shift tents on the threshing floor. But before those tents were harvest shelters they were the homes of the Israelites during their 40 year wilderness wandering and God wanted his people to remember that always. Because those 40 years was when the people of Israel came to learn what it means to depend on the will of God rather than the will of the Pharaoh.

Ok so we know that celebrating a Thanksgiving festival has very deep Biblical roots. But the next question is how do we actually give thanks. When you look at the harvest festivals around the world you see all kinds of ways people do it. Some traditions just involve a lot of wild parties and parades, some involve eating a lot of food and in the US, eating turkey with family has become so important that many people have begun calling this festival Turkey Day. It is like we are celebrating the existence of turkeys or something. If we need to get Thanksgiving right we also need to go back to the Bible to find out bring God back into focus because Thanksgiving is about our God to whom we owe everything. Now I know that this is the Sunday after Thanksgiving, but you know that there is never a time when Thanksgiving is out of season right? So let’s turn to our text for today from 1 Chr 16, a very beautiful thanksgiving hymn.

I want to begin by setting the literally context of our passage. You see the events described by the book of Chronicles parallel the events of the book of Kings. But in the book of 1 Chronicles there is a retelling of the story from God’s perspective. In what way? Firstly, you have the first 9 chapters devoted to an elaborate genealogy of David that starts from Adam. Why is this important to God? Because someone said, before you can become a “servant of God” you have to become a “child of God”. And the genealogies explain the family tree of the God’s children. So everytime you see genealogies in the Bible I want to you remember Jesus’ words to Nicodemus, “unless you are born again, you cannot see the kingdom of God”. Then as the book of Chronicles continues to tell the story, scholars think that the author is the prophet Ezra, he includes details of David’s life like, God does not allow David to build the temple, because God wanted a man of peace to build his temple. But David was permitted to bring the ark into Jerusalem. Again a detail only found in 1 Chronicles. And as David brings in the Ark, he commissions a whole worship team to organize the worship celebration they were going to have. And the worship team writes a Thanksgiving hymn for that day. This thanksgiving hymn is helps us see what God wants us to give thanks for and there are 4 important topics touched upon today so that is what we are going to look at today.

This hymn opens and closes with a call to praise God. “Give praise to the Lord, Sing to him, glory in his name, Look to the Lord, seek his face always”. And then at the close again it says, “give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, his faithfulness endures forever”.

Now encased in those two calls to thank God, we find then leading us into the whys.
The first in verse 12 it says, “remember the wonders he has performed”. Now for the Israelites they had their own miracles of God to remember. We can use their examples too. But if we only use their examples I think that amounts to spiritually laziness. Their examples say something about God but it does not say something about how God has related to you in your own life. So when you read the words, “remember the wonders he has performed”, try to think of times when God has done something amazing in your life. If our neighbor Bev was here she would surely have been able to say how God has done some wonders in her life. I personally have shared many times with you all how I have seen God come through in amazing ways in my life. God has provided me with everything and he has done it in amazing ways. God even helped me to cross international borders without the required paperwork when I was in a crunch. God saved the life, I have seen miraculous healings, miraculous provisions, miraculous heart transformations. When coming to give thanks think of God’s miraculous provision.

But God not only provides miraculously, David’s worship leaders wanted his people to remember how God protected them. Verse 19 to 22 is all about God’s protection. It says, as they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, even though they were few and they wandered from nation to nation and kingdom to kingdom, God did not let anyone oppress them. He warned Kings on their behalf and told powerful kings to “not touch my chosen people and do not hurt my prophets”. Do you have your own stories of God’s protection in your life? I have been protected so many times, whether it was when I was hanging from electric trains as I commuted to work in Mumbai, to a time when I was in trouble with the authorities in Vietnam or when I was dragged to court or found myself in a car wreck. In every one of these very different instances I can testify to God’s hand of protection in my life. I believe if you have lived any length of time with a personal relationship with God then I am sure if you go through the closets of your mind, you will have many many stories to dust off and bring into this place of worship. So that even when you are not sharing a testimony and just praising God, those memories will change the tone and volume and passion of your praises. Your singing and praises will sound like you really mean it. And that is what God wants from us. See, we are not praising God in the pattern of some pagan chant that has magical powers. No! When we praise God we are expressing to God what we have experienced of God. And if you have not yet experienced something truly amazing yet, pray and ask God to show you His amazing power. But don’t fake your praise. When you praise God you are first thanking God for the “wonders he has performed” in our lives, wonders that you can testify to.

After you recollect God’s wonders in his provision and protection, this praise hymn takes a surprising turn. In verse 12 you have the worship team praising God for the “rulings he has given”. In other words, this is praise for God’s judgments. Now this is all well and good when it is God passing judgment on bad guys and putting bad people in their place. When bad things finally happen to people like Bin Laden, or Charles Manson, or even someone like Harvey Weinstein you can thank God of God’s justice catching up to these people. And it reassures us that evil does not remain unpunished no matter how powerful the perpetrator. So we should thank God for the justice he meets out. But sometimes when we look at God’s judgment, it is not just what God has done to put others in their place, it is what God has done to put us in our place as well. We don’t usually thank God for God’s judgments that have not gone in our favor. Like the time when I got whipped as a kid because I was not getting good grades, that that pain shaped who I am today. We don’t usually thank God for the traffic tickets we get for driving over the speed limit but do you know that has saved your life in the long run? We don’t usually thank God for getting caught for doing something that was not good but it is God’s judgments against us that are the most valuable chisel marks that God uses to literally chisel us to a closer resemblance to Christ. And David’s worship team knew this as they lead their people with verse 14, “he is the Lord our God, His justice is seen throughout the land”. We need to thank God for His judgments and corrections, even those that have gone against us, when we have stepped outside His will.

We praise God for his wonderful provision, we thank God for his wonderful protection and we thank God for his justice and correction. But there is one more reason to thank God in this hymn. We thank God for his promises. What promises you might ask? Well, for these people in David’s time it was the promised land. Verse 18 reminded those people of God’s commitment to them, “I will give you the land of Canaan as your special possession”. Of course, that was part of the Old Covenant. In the New Covenant the promise was that those who put their faith in Christ will have their sins forgiven and have eternal life. And that is just the beginning. Because if you put your faith in Christ God also promised to give you a new birth in this life. A process in which Christ’s spirit will come and live in you and reciprocally you get to live in Him. If Christ is living in you then he offers to take control of your life so that you can be used by God for his purposes. This is a really big deal because the biggest deficiency we have in our world is purpose. I was just looking at a video last week about a new advance in the field of robotics. So engineers have understood the mechanics of human balance and motion so well at this point that engineers at MIT were able to create a robot that has the basic structure of a human being with two legs and two hands that is able to jump onto a 3 or four foot wall and then to a back flip off that wall and land perfectly on its feet on the ground. So you now have machines that can move better than most human beings, you have computers that can diagnose diseases better than a human doctor can, you have driverless cars on the road already in a couple cities. When you look at all the technological advances except if you are a wiz kid creating the next big thing, all other human jobs are going to be soon made obsolete. In the world of tomorrow you and I will have two choices. Go live with the Amish or figure out how to live in a super hi-tech world in which if you only do what you are doing right now, you are going to be redundant. But hear this my friends, if you have Christ living in you, no body can make you redundant. No matter what kind of technologies take over are world, it will never be able to make the Gospel obsolete. No matter what kind of artificial intelligence controls life in tomorrow’s world, it will never be able to negate God’s mission that God Himself has invited you into. And that is why we can never stop thanking God for his promises both of eternal salvation and present purpose.

Four things the 1 Chron 16 thanksgiving hymn reminds us to thank God for, His miraculous provision, His miraculous protection, His wonderful judgments and finally His everlasting promises. It is only fitting that we come into His sanctuary fully mindful of all the wonderful things God has done for us. Now can I get an Amen to that!