

**Pastor Jim Lloyd**

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**Title: Giving Thanks**

**Text: Psalm 73**

Remember back in July and August? Remember how hot it was? Remember how hot it was even in September? Remember those prayers you prayed? “Lord, please bring some cooler weather. I don’t care if it’s freezing, just bring us some cold weather.” Did you thank God this morning for answering your prayers!?! I saw someone on Facebook ask this week – “How many days until summer?” Well, NOW, it’s November. We’re just on the forefront of the Holiday season. We’re just a few days away from Thanksgiving. And what is Thanksgiving all about? Turkey and dressing and cranberry sauce? Football games and hunting? Black Friday shopping at 4:00 am? Well, starting today, I want us to look at Thanksgiving in a totally different way. This may be a stretch, but I want us to think about Thanksgiving in a way some do not. Let’s think about Thanksgiving in the context of...GIVING THANKS! As we jump into the holiday season, can we consider how we can give thanks to God?

Let me read this proclamation: “Whereas, it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor; and – Whereas, both Houses of Congress have, by their joint committee, requested me ‘to recommend to the people of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer, to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God, especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness:’ Now, therefore, I do recommend and assign Thursday, the 26<sup>th</sup> day of November next, to be devoted by the people of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being, who is the beneficent author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be; that we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection of the people of this country... – Given under my hand at the City of New York the third day of October in the year of our Lord 1789.” – George Washington.

That was the presidential proclamation where the President of the US and both Houses of Congress recommended to the people of the United States a day of thanksgiving and prayer. Can you imagine that happening today? Well, it did happen some 227 years ago, and we should be thankful. We should be thankful for this country we live in. We should give thanks for the freedoms we have – some of which are unlike any place else in the world.

Today we are going to look at Psalm 73. This Psalm was written by Asaph. Asaph was one of David’s chief musicians. Asaph has been credited with penning Psalm 50 and Psalm 73 (which we are looking at this morning) through Psalm 83. After these Psalms were written, the “Sons of Asaph” formed a guild, and played a prominent part at each revival of the national religion. (The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia.) In essence, Asaph was the Israelite Worship Leader. But there was a time when Asaph ALMOST quit worshipping. There was a day when Asaph had a hard time giving thanks to God. We’re going to see what was bothering Asaph so much. We’re going to take the Psalm a section at a time to see what’s going on. What bothered Asaph so much he almost had no thanksgiving?

Psalm 73:1-2 (MSG) – <sup>1</sup>*“An Asaph psalm No doubt about it! God is good – good to good people, good to the good-hearted. <sup>2</sup>But I nearly missed it, missed seeing his goodness.”* Asaph says, “I know God is good.” But there was a time when I ALMOST lost my faith in Him. I found myself slipping away. There was a time when I thought I had no reason to give thanks. What happened that almost caused Asaph to give up on God?

Psalm 73:3-12 (MSG) – <sup>3</sup>*“I was looking the other way, looking up to the people <sup>4</sup>At the top, envying the wicked who have it made, <sup>5</sup>Who have nothing to worry about, not a care in the whole wide world. <sup>6</sup>Pretentious with arrogance, they wear the latest fashions in violence, <sup>7</sup>Pampered and overfed, decked out in silk bows of silliness. <sup>8</sup>They jeer, using words to kill; they bully their way with words. <sup>9</sup>They’re full of hot air, loudmouths disturbing the peace. <sup>10</sup>People actually listen to them – can you believe it? Like thirsty puppies, they lap up their words. <sup>11</sup>What’s going on here? Is God out to lunch? Nobody’s tending the store. <sup>12</sup>The wicked get by with everything; they have it made, piling up riches.”* He almost lost his faith in God because of what he saw happening around him. The ones who had nothing to do with God – according to Asaph – had everything going right for them. They were prospering. Their lives seemed to be perfect. They had whatever they wanted. They had money, power, toys. They had no lack. They were evil. They were mean. They had no regard for God. And the Psalmist couldn’t understand how they got away with it. They didn’t even believe in God. If they did believe in Him, they disregarded Him, AND STILL everything goes well for them. Frankly, he was JEALOUS.

Psalm 73:13-16 (MSG) – <sup>13</sup>*“I’ve been stupid to play by the rules; what has it gotten me? <sup>14</sup>A long run of bad luck, that’s what – a slap in the face every time I walk out the door. <sup>15</sup>If I’d have given in and talked like this, I would have betrayed*

*your dear children.* <sup>16</sup>*Still, when I tried to figure it out, all I got was a splitting headache...*” Just so you know – some things ARE hard to figure out. Asaph was jealous because he felt he had given up so much for God. And what he did just didn’t seem to matter! He was beginning to think that following God was worthless. He played by the rules. He lived in a fashion that honored God and he got nothing but a heartache and a headache. Why is it like this? Why do those who disregard God seem to have everything going for them? Why do those who hold on to God often seem to have little or nothing going for them? Why does it seem the Godless are blessed and the God-fearing are cursed? Sometimes, it just doesn’t make sense.

Before we go any further, have you ever found yourself feeling like Asaph? Have YOU ever had those questions? You do your best to be who God wants you to be. You try to be content with what God has given you. You try to treat people right. And they treat you like a dog. They don’t care one iota about God. And they’ve got everything going for them. They have money, a big house, a nice car, and lots of toys. They appear happy and they’re doing it all without God. Have you ever thought, what good is it to follow God? They don’t follow God and they aren’t hurting at all. In fact, they’ve got everything. They’ve got it made AND I struggle every single day. Why am I doing this and going through all of this? WHAT DO I HAVE TO GIVE THANKS FOR? Let’s continue in Psalm 73.

Psalm 73:17 (MSG) – *“Until I entered the sanctuary of God. Then I saw the whole picture.”* Psalm 73:17 (NKJV) – *“Until I went into the sanctuary of God; Then I understood their end.”* Asaph turned back to God – and God let him in on reality.

Psalm 73:18-20 (MSG) – <sup>18</sup>*“The slippery road you’ve put them on, with a final crash in a ditch of delusions. <sup>19</sup>In the blink of an eye, disaster! A blind curve in the dark, and – nightmare! <sup>20</sup>We wake up and rub our eyes...Nothing. There’s nothing to them. And there never was.”* All that they’ll EVER HAVE, they have it NOW. If that’s what they want, God lets them walk that path. BUT know that one day IT WILL ALL DISAPPEAR. One day they will stand before the God they never believed in or the God they disregarded. Everything they thought was important will be swept away. AND THEN...they will be swept away.

Psalm 73:21-22 (MSG) – <sup>21</sup>*“When I was beleaguered and bitter, totally consumed by envy, <sup>22</sup>I was totally ignorant, a dumb ox in your very presence.”* Asaph realized that all of this came from bitterness. He was upset because he didn’t have all that the others had. He let this steal his FAITH. He let this steal his JOY. He let this steal his REASON TO THANK GOD. Now he’s seeing again what he has to be thankful for. In the last six verses, Asaph realized that he had a lot to be thankful for. And as we look at these last six verses, I want you to see that you have a lot to be thankful for, too. If you belong to God through Jesus Christ, you have at least four reasons to be thankful.

- 1. Give thanks that GOD IS NEAR.** Psalm 73:23 (MSG) – *“I’m still in your presence, but you’ve taken my hand.”* Psalm 73:23 (NIV) – *“Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand.”* Asaph was reminded that HE STILL BELONGED to the GOD that others rejected. God was holding his life in His hand. The others might have had all the WORLDLY STUFF to keep them company, but Asaph had the CREATOR OF THE WORLD holding him close. Give thanks for God’s closeness to you. You may not have all the stuff that makes you something in this world, but you have something that’s OUT OF THIS WORLD. You have a God who holds your life in His hand. He is not only near you, He is IN you. You are never apart from the God who saved you and loves you! Give thanks that God has your hand! Give thanks for God’s destiny for you. Psalm 73:24 (MSG) – *“You wisely and tenderly lead me, and then you bless me.”* Asaph realized his life was not wasted, but rather was being guided by God. God had something bigger for Asaph than worldly fame and fortune.
- 2. Give thanks that GOD CHARTS OUR COURSE.** If you are a child of God, your life is not wasted at all. You may not have much in this world, but that’s NOT God’s goal for your life. His goal is not for you to have more and more stuff. He has much bigger plans for you than that. He has a destiny for you that includes bringing Him glory, praise, and the Good News to others. Give thanks for God’s destiny for you! Give thanks for God’s possession of you. Psalm 73:25-26 (MSG) – <sup>25</sup>*“You’re all I want in heaven! You’re all I want on earth! <sup>26</sup>When my skin sags and my bones get brittle, GOD is rock-firm and faithful.”* Psalm 73:25-26 (NKJV) – <sup>25</sup>*“Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. <sup>26</sup>My flesh and my heart may fail; But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”* Asaph realized what he needed most was his relationship with God. He was thankful he belonged to God.
- 3. Give thanks that GOD POSSESSES US.** There are more important things in life than money – possessions – fame – fortune – easy life. Those are going to fade away one day. The most important thing in life is a relationship with God. If you are a believer, then YOU BELONG TO GOD! Nobody or nothing must ever take you away from God. Give thanks for God’s possession of you. Romans 8:35-39 (NKJV) – <sup>35</sup>*“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? <sup>36</sup>As it is*

written: 'For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.' <sup>37</sup>Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. <sup>38</sup>For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, <sup>39</sup>nor height or depth, nor any created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

4. **Give thanks for GOD MAKES US SECURE IN HIM!** Psalm 73:27-28 (MSG) – <sup>27</sup>"Look! Those who left you are falling apart! Deserters, they'll never be heard from again. <sup>28</sup>But I'm in the very presence of God – oh, how refreshing it is! I've made Lord GOD my home. God, I'm telling the world what you do!" Asaph knew the fate of those who DID NOT follow the Lord. BUT, he also knew the fate of those who DID follow the Lord. God is their shelter. God will always secure those who belong to Him. Give thanks for God's security for you. Those who reject the Lord have no security in the future. The stuff they're hanging on to will all fade away someday. And they will have nothing to hold on to. But you, a follower of the Lord, will always be secure in Him. He is and always will be your SHELTER. He is and always will be your PROTECTION. He is and always will be NEAR TO YOU. You can count on the Lord. He will NEVER LET YOU DOWN. He will NEVER TURN HIS BACK ON YOU. He will NEVER DROP YOU FOR SOMEONE ELSE. Give thanks that GOD MAKES US SECURE IN HIM!
5. **Conclusion.** Don't ever take the path that Asaph almost took. Don't believe for a moment that you have nothing to be thankful for. Fixing your eyes on the possessions of the unrighteous will always rob you of a grateful heart. Know that the possessions of the unrighteous are only TEMPORARY. For the righteous, THE BEST IS YET TO COME. Our reward is ETERNAL!