

Text: Psalm 136.1-26

Next week we have our guest speaker, so I have an “extra” Sunday before we start our Hebrews series.

Since tomorrow is Thanksgiving, I thought it would be worthwhile to preach a message on Thanksgiving.

Our title isn't too original, but is in the form of a question:

What Is Thanksgiving?

I've occasionally researched the history of Thanksgiving on the internet where I've found, to my amusement, how Canadian sites tend to describe it.

We are so conscious of our difference with America, you will find Canadian sites wanting to make clear that though we have a holiday with the same name as the Americans do, we are quite different in it. (And quite virtuous for being different.)

The Canadian Encyclopedia site is fairly objective, but it does have to mention that the “real” first Thanksgiving in North America happened in Canada.

Do you know who celebrated that first Thanksgiving? Martin Frobisher and his crew, in 1578, on the shores of land now included in Nunavut. We'll talk more about him later.

I found a couple of American sites who had articles on the differences (both cite the Canadian Encyclopedia as a source). Here is what CNN listed as the differences:

1. It honors a different Thanksgiving (ah... debatable)
2. It's in October (they got that one right)
3. It's not all about turkey (really??)
4. It's not observed nationwide (what they mean is that none of the Maritime provinces hold it as an official holiday)
5. Football and parades are smaller affairs
6. Black Friday is out, Boxing Day is in¹

¹ Scottie Andrew, “6 Ways Canadian Thanksgiving Is Different from the US Holiday,” CNN, October 7, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/10/07/world/canadian-thanksgiving-2019-trnd/index.html>.

All of that is mildly interesting and maybe amusing, but our question remains, “*What Is Thanksgiving?*”

Read Ps 136.1-2

Proposition: Biblical thanksgiving puts the focus on God’s redemptive grace towards men.

I. The words of Thanksgiving

A. Hebrew words

1. *yādhāh*, הִדָּה

- a. ‘*yādhāh* takes on this force only through its context and is rather a synonym for ‘praise’ or ‘bless’”²
- b. Synonym of *hālāl* (see *hallelujah*), which tends to stress giving acclaim, boasting in, glorying in its object
- c. “The primary meaning of this root is ‘to acknowledge or confess sin, God’s character and works, or man’s character.’”³
- d. Translated normally by a word in the “confession” group by the LXX
- e. Uses
 - 1) To confess sin
 - 2) To confess God’s attributes and works — “This concept is at the heart of the meaning of praise”⁴
 - 3) But never used between man and man: no Hebrew word for “thanks,” — the best we can find is the Heb. word for “bless”

² Burton Scott Easton, “Thank, Thanks, Thanksgiving,” in James Orr et al., eds., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Chicago: The Howard-Severance Company, 1915), 2964–65.

³ Ralph H. Alexander, “847 הִדָּה,” in R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 364.

⁴ Alexander, 364.

2. todah, תודה

- a. This is a noun derived from the verb
- b. Shares the “semantic range” of the verb — “basically means ‘confession,’ either of sin or of God’s character and works”⁵

“The Old Testament lacks an independent vocabulary of thanksgiving or gratitude; it uses the verb *yādâ*, and the cognate noun *tôdâ*, both ordinarily translated as “praise,” to convey the concept.”⁶

“The expression of thanks to God is included in praise, *it is a way of praising.*”⁷

I would add, it is a praise that *confesses*, it orients men in their relationship to God.

B. Greek words

1. eucharistêō, εὐχαριστέω [38 times]

a. Nouns

- 1) eucharistia, εὐχαριστία [6 times]
- 2) eucharistos, εὐχάριστος [1 time]

b. Meaning

- 1) “It is used in the NT only of giving thanks to God, except for one occasion where it is unclear whether the person giving thanks to Jesus believed him to be God (Luke 17:16).”⁸ (the one Samaritan who came back to thank Jesus)
- 2) “Christians are to abound in thanksgiving (*eucharistia*) in light of their rootedness in Christ (Col 2:7). Thus the Scriptures indicate that thanksgiving is a central Christian virtue, intended to replace despair, anxiety, and worldly ways.”⁹

⁵ Alexander, 365.

⁶ Daniel Doriani, “Thankfulness, Thanksgiving,” in Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 769.

⁷ Alexander, 365.

⁸ John Frederick, “Praise and Thanksgiving,” in Douglas Mangum, ed., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

⁹ *Ibid.*

2. charis, χάρις (Rm 6.17) [10 times]
 - a. Normally, “grace”
 - b. But ten times “thanks”
3. Words of confession
 - a. anthomologeomai, ἀνθομολογέομαι (Lk 2.38) [1 time]
 - 1) Usually “praise” in the NT
 - 2) Sometimes “confess”
 - b. homologeo, ὁμολογέω (Hb 13.15) [1 time]
 - c. exomologéō, ἐξομολογέω (LXX for yādhāh)

“Thanksgiving is a motive for Christian life and conduct, a general attitude toward both the blessings and trials of life, a central component of prayer, and the context for the proper use of material things.”¹⁰

Thanksgiving acknowledges God’s grace: we give thanks for that which God graciously gives us.

II. The main ground of Thanksgiving

A. In the OT

1. The goodness of God (as in Ps 136.1)
2. Worshipping God is done by thanksgiving
3. Cries for aid or songs of lament often conclude with thanksgiving
4. Specific instances
 - a. When David returned the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem
 - b. Daily ritual of praise and thanksgiving in the temple
 - c. At the end of David’s life, he offered thanks to God in his final public prayer (1 Chr 29.13)

“Despite the paucity of the language of thanksgiving, gratitude or something akin to it was foundational for covenant life in the Old Testament. The law rested upon gratitude for God’s redeeming work.”¹¹

¹⁰ Doriani, 769.

¹¹ Doriani, 769.

B. In the NT

1. In the Gospels and Acts, most often occurs in prayer over a meal
 - a. Interesting contrast, Jesus gave thanks before he fed the 5,000 (Jn 6.11)

Jn 6.11 Jesus then took the loaves, and having given thanks, He distributed to those who were seated; likewise also of the fish as much as they wanted.

- b. But the crowd did not (Jn 6.23-24)

Jn 6.23-24 There came other small boats from Tiberias near to the place where they ate the bread after the Lord had given thanks.²⁴ So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they themselves got into the small boats, and came to Capernaum seeking Jesus.

2. The giving of thanks for forgiven sin: introduced in Gospels, repeated in epistles
 - a. The sinful woman who anoints Jesus' feet with perfume (Lk 7.40-47)
 - b. Believers called to give thanks in all things (Eph 5.20, 1 Thess 5.18)
 - c. The language of sacrifice a reasonable response to salvation: give your whole self to God, a sacrifice of Thanksgiving (Rm 6.13, 12.1; 1 Cor 6.20)

III. The song of Thanksgiving (Ps 136)

- A. The main theme of the psalm: God's lovingkindness (hesed) [covenant loyalty]
- B. The grounds of thanksgiving in the psalm
 1. God's character and person (1-3)
 2. God the mighty Creator (4-9)
 3. God the redeemer of Israel [Exodus] (10-16)
 4. God the victor [conquest] (17-22)
 5. God the friend of his people (23-26)

Conclusion:

I mentioned Sir Martin Frobisher at the beginning of the message. He was a seaman during the reign of Elizabeth I. He got involved in the fabled attempts to find the “Northwest Passage” over North America. His exploits added to the knowledge of the North but were marked by much frustration and lack of success.

In his **first voyage**, 1576, he discovered a bay on Baffin Island, now named for him (Frobisher Bay), which he thought was a strait. On this voyage, he discovered a rock that he thought contained gold...

This led to a **second voyage**, in 1577, in which the object was to find gold, not the NW passage. He brought back 200 tonnes of ore...

Queen Elizabeth commissioned his **third voyage**, with an eye to the “gold.” He had more ships and backing, but one ship sank on the way over, another turned back, and they abandoned the whole idea of creating a mining settlement as it proved to difficult... but this time they brought back 1350 tonnes of ... iron pyrites, or “fool’s gold.”¹²

The difficulties of this last voyage led to the first “Thanksgiving service” in North America. They arrived at Frobisher’s Bay in July. The voyage was so harrowing, they thought to give Thanksgiving to God.

- Remember, this was July — poor unlucky Martin couldn’t even get the month right!
- They ate a meal of salt beef, biscuits, and mushy peas to celebrate and give thanks for their safe arrival
- They celebrated communion, led by their chaplain

One of the company reported that the chaplain, “made unto them a godly sermon, exhorting them especially to be thankfull to God for theyr strange and miraculous deliverance in those so dangerous places.”¹³

Notice that word — deliverance...

Proposition: Biblical thanksgiving puts the focus on God’s redemptive grace towards men.

¹² “Sir Martin Frobisher | The Canadian Encyclopedia,” accessed October 8, 2022, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/sir-martin-frobisher>.

¹³ “Thanksgiving in Canada | The Canadian Encyclopedia,” accessed October 8, 2022, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/thanksgiving-day>.

Let's go back to Psalm 136 – I'd like to close our service by doing it as a responsive reading.