“THAT WE MAY GIVE THANKS TO YOUR HOLY NAME”

1 Chronicles 16:1–43

Key Verse: 16:35

“Cry out, ‘Save us, God our Savior; gather us and deliver us from the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise.’”

Chronicles was written for Jews who’d come back from Babylonian Captivity. By now they’d lived through at least 100 years of devastation. After David’s kingdom had been divided, the southern half, Judah, had been destroyed, and the temple had, too. The people had been taken as slaves and lived on the bottom of society in Babylon. There was really nothing left of Israel. Chronicles was written to help these returning exiles restore their relationship with God as his covenant people. It teaches that keeping God’s covenant is the only way to live under his blessings. Keeping God’s covenant requires listening to God’s word and to his prophets (2Ch20:20). In Chronicles’ descriptions of some of Israel’s best kings we can see the hope of our Messiah Jesus. Overall, Chronicles expresses a deep concern for all God’s scattered, remnant people, no matter where they are. Chronicles tells us that God is still there; he hasn’t forgotten his people; he’s deeply interested in us and cares for us.

In today’s passage there’s a medley of psalms to be sung. We don’t know what the melodies of these psalms were, but their words help us to look up at God. Usually, we think that to be thankful, we need to find good things in our lives. But to truly be thankful, we need to come to God and reflect on who he is. The Chronicler especially wanted the returning exiles to know that God rescues and delivers us so that we might give thanks to his holy name (35b). In today’s Bible study let’s learn more about who God is and what he’s like. At this Thanksgiving, as we think about him, may he fill our hearts with real thanks.

In chapters 10–15 Israel’s first king, Saul, takes his life (10:5,13–14), and David is made king over all Israel (11:3). The first thing David does as king is to lead the people to capture the impregnable fortress of Zion, also known as Jerusalem, and it’s renamed “the city of David” (11:4–7). During Saul’s reign, David was the one who had led the people on their military campaigns (11:2). Through those experiences many mighty men had come to follow David (11:10–47), and many soldiers from all Israel volunteered to join him now (12:1–40). David was such a strong man, but surprisingly, he was really interested in God. So he conferred with all his military officers and with all Israel to call all the priests and Levites to join them, and to bring the ark of God back among his people to Jerusalem (13:1–4). It symbolized bringing God back into the center of his people’s lives. David mentioned that during Saul’s reign, they’d not been inquiring of God (13:3b). It meant they’d not been praying or seeking God’s guidance; they’d just been doing what they thought best. Having the ark at the center of their nation meant becoming godly, God-centered people. This was how David wanted to lead them. There are many physically strong men; but a truly strong man is a godly man. However, in bringing the ark, a tragedy ensued. Oxen were pulling a cart on which the ark was being carried. When the oxen stumbled, a man named Uzzah reached out his hand to steady the ark. When that happened, it says that the Lord’s anger burned against him, and he struck him down and he died (13:7–10). It was a public sign of God’s disfavor with David. God had commanded that only the Levites were to carry the ark, and that they were to carry it through poles on their shoulders, not by using a cart (Ex25:14–15; 1Ch15:15). David had realized a painful lesson: to do things in God’s way, carefully following his word, instead of doing things in his own way. Still, God was with David, helping him. God moved the heart of a wealthy man to build David a cedar palace (14:1). David realized that God had established him as king and highly exalted his kingdom, not for his own glory and honor, but for the sake of his people Israel (14:2). When Israel’s enemies the Philistines heard about it, they came out in full force to attack them (14:8). But David didn’t depend on his own strength or past military prowess; he first inquired of God, and he did exactly as God had commanded him; then God gave his people a great victory (14:10–17). It tells us that strong man isn’t stubborn; a truly strong man is humble enough to listen to God. David prepared a place for the ark in Jerusalem, and this time he carefully followed God’s instructions on how to move it (15:1–2,13–15). David also had musicians playing as the ark was being transported (15:16–22). He himself joined the Levites, dressed like them and celebrated with them, which caused his wife Michal to despise him in her heart (15:27–29).

This is where chapter 16 begins. Look at verses 1–3. David has burnt offerings and fellowship offerings presented, to express his thanks not just for victories in battle or success in moving the ark, but mainly that God had truly restored his relationship with his people. It teaches that perhaps the greatest thing to be thankful for is to even have a relationship with God in the first place. David also blessed each one of his people with a fellowship meal. It tells us that eating together out of thanks to God is also very important.

Read verse 4. Usually, kings are very sensitive about their own honor and glory. But David wanted some men to be with the ark full-time, extolling, thanking and praising the LORD. In verse 5 there were ten of these men, with Asaph as their chief (cf. 16:7). In the Old Testament, twelve of the Psalms are attributed to this man Asaph. Asaph became the leader of a group of temple singers. In verses 5b–6 we see there were lyres, harps, cymbals and trumpets. David commissioned this music and singing to be done around the ark. David himself had played the harp from his boyhood and came to be known as “the sweet psalmist of Israel” (2Sa23:1, KJV); almost half of the 150 Psalms in the Bible were written by him. But David didn’t just like to hear himself singing; it was authentic. He would sing to the Lord because he was genuinely in love with him. Again unexpected: a strong man who loved to sing sweet songs to God.

The main part of chapter 16 is the song in verses 8–36. This song is a compilation of sections from Psalm 105, Psalm 96, and Psalm 106. The Chronicler arranged them together to inspire the people to start singing to God again. By singing these songs, they could know God better and remember better who God really is. Singing is still a great way to start thinking about God.

Let’s read the opening of the song, verses 8–11. What we notice here is how God-centered the song is. The emphasis in the lyrics is on God himself: “Give praise *to the LORD;* proclaim *his name*; make known among the nations what *he* has done. Sing *to him*, sing praise *to him;* tell of all *his* wonderful acts. Glory in *his holy name*…” There are so many things in life vying for our attention and affection. What’s worse, in our sinful nature we’re naturally so self-centered, constantly trying to validate, justify and magnify ourselves. And since God is invisible and works so quietly, it’s so easy to ignore him. In this noisy world it’s so easy to focus on people or things and be impressed by them. But this psalm calls us to the One who’s actually really worthy of praise, the One really worthy of talking about. We should not only “praise” him, “sing praise” to him, “sing to” him and “glory” in him, but also “make him known” and “tell” others about him. He’s “done” some things, some “wonderful acts,” which reveal more about who he is. We also notice in these verses that “his name” is repeated twice. “His name” isn’t an appellation, as we know it; “his name” represents his character, what he’s really like. And here, among so many possible descriptors, his name is called “holy.” It means we should thank God that, in this world full of sin, he is holy.

Read verses 12–14. Here the psalmist admonishes both the former exiles and us to “remember.” What are we to remember? We’re to remember God’s wonders, miracles and judgments. These things started in Egypt when God delivered the Israelites from their slavery. Through his wonders, miracles and judgments God revealed that he is more powerful than even the most wealthy and powerful people and nations on earth. He also revealed how much he loves his own people, even though they may be so weak and broken down like helpless slaves. In verse 13 they are called “his servants” and “his chosen ones.” God’s people are still his servants and his chosen ones, even though to worldly people’s eyes they may look like losers or weirdoes. We’re his servants and his chosen ones only by his grace, which is something to really be thankful for. We’re to remember that he is the LORD *our* God, and that his judgments are “in all the earth” (14). This gives us real confidence and even fearlessness.

Read verses 15–18. Here the psalmist reminds us of God’s covenant. God’s covenant with Abraham and his descendants was to give them the land of Canaan someday. It was just a shadow of God’s covenant with us today, to give us an inheritance in his eternal kingdom through faith in Jesus (1Pe1:3–4). Verse 15 says, “He remembers…” Though so many things may happen, though so many people may totally forget it, God remembers. God especially remembers his covenant with us. In 15:25–16:6 the author calls the ark not just “the ark of God” but “the ark of the covenant” of the LORD five times. The ark itself was not like a magic charm; it represented God’s covenant with his people. What is God’s covenant with his people? In Exodus, God said he had delivered his people and brought them to himself so that they would obey him fully and keep his covenant, so that out of all nations he would make them his treasured possession (Ex19:4–5). His covenant with them was based on his one-sided, redeeming grace. His covenant was that, in light of his grace, they would know his words and keep them fully. As they struggled to know and keep his words, they would be like God’s little representatives or ambassadors on earth. They would be for him, as God himself put it, “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex19:6). It wouldn’t be just a special class of people who would be priests—the whole nation, from the least to the greatest, would be priests. Their presence as a people, wherever they went, would help other people of the world begin to see God.

The Bible says that Jesus made a new covenant with us. How did he do that? He said the new covenant is “in my blood, which is poured out for you” (Lk22:20). The Bible also says that Jesus’ new covenant is better than the old one made with the Israelites. Why is it better? It’s because it’s based on better promises (Heb8:6). The Israelites didn’t remain faithful to God’s covenant; they couldn’t obey him fully and keep it. But the new covenant is based not on our performance, but on God actually changing our minds and hearts. In Hebrews 8:10b–12 God promises, “I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more.” This change of mind and heart, this experiencing a personal knowledge of God and his forgiveness, happens when we repent of our sins, believe in Jesus and receive the Holy Spirit. Experiencing the grace of forgiveness of sins in Jesus personally writes God’s new covenant on our hearts. This covenant with us God will never forget, no matter what happens. This new covenant gives us a new identity and a new mission in life. This new covenant makes even sinners like us “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1Pe2:9). Having this new covenant with God through his Son Jesus is maybe the best thing to be thankful for.

Read verses 19–22. These verses describe the Israelites all throughout their history. It especially describes the exiles from Babylon. They looked pitiful, wandering around like small herds of mountain goats. But God calls them “my anointed ones” and “my prophets.” Sometimes today we feel so weak and small compared with the people of the world. But when we depend on God, he’ll even rebuke kings on account of us; he’ll defend and protect us.

Read verses 23–24. The psalmist calls us to sing to the Lord and proclaim his salvation “day after day.” Singing to the Lord should be something we do not just at church, as a ritual, but part of our personal life, and it should be happening daily. When we sing to the Lord, we can be thankful not just on a holiday, but all year. And along with our singing to the Lord, we also need to be talking about him to others. If we’re too mousy and fearful, we can’t glorify God. But as we declare his glory, our faith in him actually grows. If we know his glory, we actually can’t help but want to tell people about his “marvelous deeds.” It’s through people who really know him and thank him that God spreads the knowledge of him to many people around the world.

Why should we be singing, declaring and proclaiming? Read verses 25–27. We should be helping people to know the true, living God. When we come to know him, we realize that other things and people we idolize are actually nothing. We not only revere God in his splendor and majesty, but also experience real strength and joy in him. Read verses 28–30. These verses call us to “ascribe” or “give” God the glory that is due him. Why should we be thanking God? In light of these verses, it’s because it’s “due him.” In light of who God is and what he’s done, it’s wrong not to be filled with gratitude to him. We also see here that truly thanking God can’t be just lip service or an inner feeling; it means bringing him an offering and worshipping him. We need to worship him “in the splendor of his holiness,” with “fear and trembling” (Php2:12). Read verses 31–33. Here we notice “the heavens,” “the earth,” “the sea,” “the fields” and “the trees.” It means all creation. Nothing and no one in all creation is exempt, because God made all of them. We also see the words “rejoice,” “be glad,” “jubilant,” and “sing for joy.” Thanking God makes us truly joyful. Verse 34 is very famous. Let’s read it. We thank God because he is good, and because his love endures forever.

Let’s read our key verse, verse 35. This verse is the natural climax of the psalm. When we know God who is so great and so good, we don’t have to live in despair, loneliness or helplessness. We can cry out, “Save us, God our Savior!” And as we experience God’s help, we can give thanks to him and glory in his holy name. God saves us so that we can live as his thankful people. So this Thanksgiving, let’s spend some time with God, thinking of who he really is and what he’s done for us, until our souls are filled with real thanks.