

## **Series FolkSongs of Faith**

### **This Message Thanksgiving For the LORD's Goodness and Faithfulness**

#### **Scripture Psalm 100**

Today we are concluding the series on Psalms 90 through 100. These Psalms had a local and immediate context when they were written, but, as we have been learning, they also provide excellent teachings about the end of this age when Jesus will return to earth to establish His sovereign and eternal rule.

It will be a wonderful day when the LORD Jesus returns. The “righteous will flourish ... in the courts of the LORD” (*Psalm 92:12-13*). It will be an especially joyous time for believers who will assemble from all the nations in order to “ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name.” They will “worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness” (*Psalm 96:7-9*). Even “the physical creation will be glad” and join in the jubilant singing and praising because “the LORD has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations” (*Psalm 98:2, 7-8*). Those are several quotes from this series of Psalms that should make our hearts glad.

There is another significant aspect associated with the LORD's return: the judgment of evildoers. According to Psalm 94 and others that we studied, the LORD will “pay back to the proud what they deserve” for their injustices and oppression of the LORD's people (*Psalm 94:2*). At the end of the age, the LORD will remove everyone and everything that is not compatible with His holy character.

Since these Psalms give specific attention to the visible universal reign of the LORD on the earth, they are considered to be “theocratic” in nature. Most commentators consider Psalm 100 to be the doxology or summary of the accomplishments of the previous Psalms.

#### **Read Psalm 100**

Before we think about the meanings of the verses, I want to call your attention to a couple of interesting details. This is the only psalm in the Psalter with a heading that says what it is — “A Psalm for Giving Thanks.”

Structurally, the text divides naturally into two parts. Each part consists of a call to give thanks followed by an explanation of the reasons for thanksgiving. In verses 1 and 2 “All the earth” is summoned to “shout to the LORD,” and to “worship the LORD,” and to “come before the LORD.” Verse 3 gives the reason: the people are to “know that the LORD is God.”

In verse 4 there are three more invitations: “enter the gates of the LORD,” “enter the courts of the LORD,” and then “give thanks to the LORD.” Verse 5 gives the reason for the invitations: “The LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.”

*[Gratuitous Comment: When composing the Psalm, the writer placed these commands in a stylized poetic form. In verses 1 and 2 the commands can be labeled “A,” “B,” and “C;” in verse 4 they are “C,” “B,” and “A.” The “A” commands are concerned with loud noisy “shouting” and “praise;” the “B”s are about “worship” and “giving thanks;” and the “C”s instruct readers to “come” and “enter.” Poets liken this technique to climbing some steps and then coming back down the steps.]*

I also want to point out that there are seven important verbs used in this Psalm. “Shout” (v1), “worship” and “come” (v2), “know” (v 3), and the words “enter,” “give thanks,” and “praise” (v4). In Hebrew poetry, emphasis is often given to the middle word in a set of words. That word is the verb “know,” a word that can also mean “appreciate,” “acknowledge” or “confess”. Hence, all the shouting and worshiping of the LORD, and coming into His presence, and giving thanks and praising Him is linked to what can be known and recognized about Him.

Believers must have a deep understanding and appreciation for the truth that “the LORD is God.” The remainder of verse 3 explains why “the LORD is God:” “He made us, we are his, we are his people.” This verse speaks of His ownership of our lives. The Apostle Paul also taught this truth: “You are not your own; you were bought at a price” (*I Corinthians 6:19-20*). We belong to the LORD for three reasons: He created us, He died for us, and He called us to Himself. Ideally, we, today, will live each day with a strong sense of appreciation and acknowledgement of who the LORD is.

One of the questions I have had as I studied these Psalms is “just who is summoning and instructing the believers to gather around the LORD Jesus?” and to “shout,” “worship,” and “come?” In the Old Testament era, it was probably a priest who gave the call to the Israelites to come worship the LORD at the temple. At the end of the age, will the invitation of a religious leader be necessary? Who did the Psalm writer have in mind to issue the commands?

It seems to me that at that future time every believer will be urging his or her friends to shout and worship and go meet the LORD. Each verse reflects the natural desire of every believer to acclaim the LORD, and to hasten to be with Him. I have concluded that the speakers in these Psalms, the individuals who are urging others to come into the presence of the LORD, are ordinary believers—very excited believers! They are simply besides themselves with joy. It would certainly be appropriate for believers today to have a level of excitement that would begin to match the excitement of those at the end of the age. Just think what incredible witnesses for Jesus we would be in our communities!

The believers at the end of the age will “shout for joy” with an exuberance that exceeds that of the home team after the winning goal is scored. Or, to put their joy into the context of the Old Testament, the sound of their rejoicing will exceed the public acclaim lifted up to the victorious king after he has defeated his enemies and reestablished his kingdom. Establishing the kingdom. That is, in fact, what Jesus will accomplish at His return.

The gathering believers will encourage each other to “worship.” This word “worship” has a double meaning. It can be translated “serve,” and, in fact, in several Bible translations, verse 2 reads, “Serve the LORD with gladness.” Worship and service go together. Jesus Himself said so when He responded to the temptation of the devil with the words, “It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only’” (*Matthew 4:10*).

The reality is that people are in bondage to, or, literally, slaves to, whatever God or gods are the priorities of their lives. Ideally the priorities of humans will be their attachments to the one true God, and that they will gladly be obedient to Him as their Master and Lord. However, all too often in our world it is a false god or an addiction or an ambition for money and power or some other priority that dominates human attitudes and behaviors.

Think about the faith of believers who will live near the end of the age. Their faith will be severely challenged. Worldly pressures on the followers of Jesus will be great. They may be stripped of their possessions and rights, subjected to threats and even killed. Jesus told His disciples that they could expect persecution in the world, and He said that even the “elect” would find it difficult to stay focused on God and His ways in the last days. Now, just imagine, after Jesus returns, and evildoers are judged, and the righteous are revealed, just imagine the relief, the joy, the enthusiasm that believers will have. They will enter a new phase of their lives, be privileged to meet the LORD face to face, and qualified to worship and serve the LORD for eternity. They will enthusiastically worship the LORD “with gladness,” a word which suggests unreserved laughter and gaiety and freedom.

As I said earlier, verse 3 is a very significant verse. The word “know” means more than to understand. It means to acknowledge and confess and accept in a personal way that “the LORD is God.” Verse 3 is placed in this Psalm to remind us of the intimate relationship between believers and the LORD. Keep in mind that verse 3 is a statement made by believers to believers. Every believer in this life has a different experience with the LORD. Each personal encounter is different. Each believer is at a different level of spiritual maturity. During this age, “we do not yet know what we will be.” However, Scripture informs us that “when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (*1 John 3:2*).

It is my opinion that verse 3 is describing the time of transition between what we can know about the LORD in this life and what we will be able to understand when we are in the actual presence of the LORD. At that time we will know the LORD in a much more intimate way than we do now. Our questions and uncertainties will have clear answers. Our spiritual uncertainties will be overcome. At that time, believers will be encouraging other each other toward full understanding.

Verse 3 also reminds us of three very important aspects of our relationship to the LORD. First, we are accountable to Him. “He made us,” and therefore we belong to Him by right of His creative efforts. We are not autonomous or self-sufficient beings, although many people think they are; nor can we presume to chart our own destinies, although many people try to do so. We were made to give glory to the LORD, and when we refuse to do this, there are consequences. We are accountable creatures.

Secondly, the LORD has granted believers a privileged position. “We are his people,” not only because of our creaturely characteristics, but because we belong to Him as members of His spiritual family. We have been redeemed, purchased by Him at the cost of His death on the cross.

Furthermore, in the same way that Yahweh called Abraham out of his homeland for a special purpose, and then called Israel out of Egypt to be His special people, in similar fashion God is calling people out of the world to Himself. The followers of Jesus are Yahweh’s people. We can say that He has the rights of ownership over believers at two levels, physical and spiritual.

The third aspect in verse 3 has to do, like the first one, with accountability, only this time it concerns behavior and not who we are. “We are the sheep of the LORD’s pasture.” We, as believers, are expected to live under the authority of a Shepherd. We are expected to obediently follow where our Shepherd leads us. Our Shepherd is responsible for our protection, and for “making us lie down in green pastures and leading us beside quiet waters.” He is the One who “guides us in paths of righteousness” (*Psalms 23:2-3*). As sheep, we are dependent upon Him for all that we are and have. As David wrote, “The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want” (*Psalms 23:1*).

Verse 4 describes the path a worshiper must take into the presence of God. At the wilderness tabernacle and later at the permanent temple in Jerusalem, there was only one main entrance through which worshipers could enter. This was symbolic of the principle that there is only one way to approach God (*cf John 14:6*). Inside the gate there was a large courtyard with the basin and altar, symbolic of the need of the worshiper to be spiritually clean when approaching God. Beyond the courtyard was the temple proper, which had two rooms, one of which contained the Ark of the Covenant, the place where Yahweh said He would dwell among His people.

At the end of the age, circumstances will be different. The presence of Yahweh will no longer be hidden inside one of the temple rooms. Instead, the LORD will be publicly manifested in the person of Jesus. The worshipers in verse 4 will be approaching the visible LORD Jesus. He will be the obvious reality in front of everyone.

Verse 5 provides the basis for the repeated calls for praise. Three reasons are given. First, “the LORD is good.” The goodness of God is seen in His moral character and in His benevolence toward humanity. Included in the definition of “goodness” is His holiness, righteousness, justice, purity, love, and all the other attributes we can think of. His “goodness” is so pure, so brilliant, so consuming, that mere physical humans cannot look upon it and live. However, the believers at the end of the age will be able to stand in the presence of our “good” God. They will be clothed with His goodness, and, as a result, “they will be like him.”

The second reason to praise the LORD is “his love which endures forever.” This word for “love” is often translated “kindness” or even better, “loving-kindness” (Hebrew “hesed”). The love of God underlies all that He has done and is doing. It is the most essential part of His DNA. It was love that caused the members of the Godhead to decide to create outside of themselves, even though they were sufficient within themselves. Love is the greatest characteristic of God, and is the one attribute from which all others emanate. As far as humanity is concerned, the incarnation and the subsequent death of Jesus on the cross was the highest disclosure and most complete proof of divine love. Love will be the attribute of God which will endure as long as God Himself endures, which is, of course, forever. The Apostle John stated the obvious fact that “God is love.”

The third reason to praise the LORD is his “faithfulness which continues through all generations,” from the time of Adam and Eve throughout human history. Faithfulness is an attribute ascribed to God in many Scriptures. We can think of faithfulness as an “external” attribute of God; which is to say, it can be understood only through His commitments and actions. God made many promises to His human creatures. It was His character as God which ensured the fulfillment of these obligations. From our standpoint in time, we have several thousand years of history to confirm the reliability of God’s accomplishments, and, therefore, we have every reason to believe that He will continue to be trustworthy in the future. The faithfulness of God has been evident for as long as there have been people on earth, although too many people have refused to acknowledge it.

According to the book of Revelation, when Jesus appears at the end of the age, He will be identified by two special names, “Faithful and True” (*Revelation 19:11*). The promises of Scripture, from the first promise immediately after the disobedience of Adam and Eve, all the way through the Old and New Testaments, up until the very end of time as we know it, will all be fulfilled in the LORD Jesus. At the end of the age, believers will be able to look back and confirm the faithfulness of the LORD.

I hope you will keep in mind the goodness, the love, and the faithfulness of God. A proper appreciation of the character of God will motivate us in our spiritual lives, sustain us in times of difficulties, and prepare us to meet Jesus face to face.