

## The *First* Thanksgiving Hymn

### The Song: Volume 2, Part 8

#### *Psalm 100*

Sarah Hale was born in 1788. She was, among other talents, a poet . . . her poem, *Mary's Lamb*, which begins with, *Mary had a little Lamb* became so universally known that Thomas Edison used those opening lines when he delivered the first speech ever recorded on his newly invented phonograph – which we know as the record player; you know, that machine that spins round disks.

Sarah became the editor of at least two different magazines for women, and she used her influence to argue for the end of slavery. And she also appealed to several United States presidents to set aside one special day for an annual day of national thanksgiving to God.

After decades of persistence, Abraham Lincoln was the president who finally agreed with her request.

Lincoln actually seemed the most unlikely candidate to launch a national day of thanksgiving, because it was a time in American history that no one would have been interested in thanking God for anything – the civil war had been raging for several years.

But Lincoln proclaimed it so, and the first observance was in 1863 – right in the middle of the Civil War.

By the way, President Lincoln's proclamation included these words: I do therefore invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States . . . to observe a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our Father, who dwelleth in the Heavens. And I recommend to them that while offering up [statements of praise] due to Him for . . . blessings . . . they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience."

In other words, Abraham Lincoln wanted Thanksgiving Day to become nothing less than a day of national confession and revival.

Since that time, every president has proclaimed Thanksgiving a national observance on the final Thursday of November . . . in fact the role of each sitting president included a special Thanksgiving proclamation for the last 175 years.

However, I found it interesting that one year, Thanksgiving was celebrated in December, because President Andrew Johnson forgot to make the annual declaration.

Which should encourage us all – even the president of the United States can forget to thank God.

The truth is we tend to resemble Andrew Johnson more than ever, don't we. As far as our world is concerned, Thanksgiving is just a speed bump on the way to Christmas.

If anything, Thanksgiving is a day to shop – not necessarily give thanks.

And that shouldn't be a surprise either, right? According to chapter 1 of Romans, one of the chief characteristics of a digressing culture is the growth of ingratitude.

You might think that the marks of a perverse society (as President Lincoln called his) would be the increase of murder or immoral behavior.

But according to Paul's letter to Timothy, he said that a wicked and corrupt culture would be filled with people who are ungrateful. (*2 Timothy 3:2*). In fact, he puts ingratitude on the list before he adds words like, *unholy, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God (v. 4)*.

It's interesting that the mark of a godless culture is revealed in their attitude as much as it is in their actions.

Paul described a perverse culture as a people who *refuse to give thanks – he writes, For even though they knew about God, Paul wrote, they did not honor Him as God, nor give thanks (Romans 1:21).*

Maybe that's why it is a distinctive attitude among believers to be thankful.

Even more, Paul commanded the early believers to *“be thankful” (Colossians 3:15)*

Be thankful.

In other words, “Say thank you! Express gratitude!”

Our attitudes need reshaping . . . and transforming; from being pressed into the mold of the world – which is marked by ingratitude, and being pressed into the mold of Christ, which is marked by gratitude.

Don't overlook the fact that our Lord modeled it for us.

At the time of his greatest crisis – in the hours leading up to His brutal crucifixion and the agony of His separation from the Father and the stench of becoming a sin offering for us, Jesus Christ . . . bread and wine – the elements that would remind the church for 2,000 years now of his suffering – His crucified body and His shed blood – and he took these elements that represented all of that agony and suffering and . . . gave thanks.

- That's like a surviving Jew going back to Auschwitz and standing in the courtyard and giving thanks!
- That's like a parent going back to that intersection where a drunk driver took the life of their child . . . and giving thanks.
- That's like a man or woman going back to the Cancer Center where they first heard the news of their terminal disease and giving thanks.
- That's like a country ripped apart by death and division – stopping for a day – right in the middle of the Civil War – and finding something whereby they can give thanks to God.

You say, “That's unnatural.” And I would agree. It *is* unnatural . . . it *is* . . . supernatural.

The truth is, we need to be taught how to be thankful, and we need to be reminded why.

Because, we're a lot like Andrew Johnson . . . we tend to forget.

Let's go back into our Hebrew hymnal . . . the book of Psalms – literally, The Book of Praises – to Psalm 100.

Psalm 100 is the only Psalm designated as a public guide to thanksgiving.

You could call Psalm 100, the original Thanksgiving Hymn.

Old Testament believers and 21<sup>st</sup> century New Testament believers have the same two questions about giving thanks:

1. “How do we give thanks to God?”
2. “Why do we give thanks to God?”

If you'd like to outline in your text this original Thanksgiving hymn – you can do it with two words – *Verses 1 & 2* answers the question “How” . . . and *verse 3* answers the question “Why?”

And since some of us are remedial students, David repeats the lesson again as he answers in *verse 4* “How we give thanks” and in *verse 5*, “Why?”

David answers the first question, “How do we give thanks” with three keywords.

**1. You could circle the first keyword, “Shout.”**

***Verse 1. Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth.***

Literally, raise your voice with words of celebration. These are verbal statements of thanksgiving and praise to God.

We interrupt the darkness of our world with praise like fireworks that turn the night sky into blazing color.

And did you notice in *verse 1* that as far as David was concerned, *all the earth* is invited to join him?

**2. The second keyword is serve – verse 2. Serve the Lord.**

And would you notice – *serve the Lord with gladness*. If you happen to be serving the Lord but you're not very glad about it, it might be that you have forgotten who you are ultimately serving.

Ultimately, you are not serving the church; you are serving the Lord. You are not serving this pastor; you are not serving that department; you are not serving your children, or your spouse or your parents or your boss . . . you are actually serving the Lord.<sup>i</sup>

Now listen – make a note of the fact that David doesn't put a period after, ***Serve the Lord.***

There's no period there . . . David commands us to ***“serve the Lord with gladness.”***

Can you imagine being told to be glad?

Sure you can; you've told your children:

“You better change your attitude right now and put on a happy face.”

“You better quit pouting and start smiling, or you won't get a happy meal. Happy meals are for happy children!”

Where'd you learn that from? Your parents. And that was before Happy Meals.

“Listen here young man, you better adjust your attitude.”

Remember that one?

And now we're saying the same thing!

It does have some merit, though . . . because now you're old enough to know that attitudes can actually be adjusted.

And God evidently thinks so too. David does not say here, “Serve the Lord whether you're glad about it or not.” He actually says, “Serve the Lord and be glad about it.”

When our children were little, they got an allowance for doing their chores, but they only got paid if they did their chores with the right attitude.

They had to serve our household with gladness.

In fact, get this – we expected them to adjust their attitude simply because it was our will.

Because we wanted to prepare them to one day serve the Lord with the right attitude – because their heavenly Father was going to expect the same thing.

Paul writes in ***2 Thessalonians 5:18, “In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God.”***

Evidently God expects us to adjust our attitude simply because it is His will.

Which means that a thankful heart is not a personality trait, it is an act of the will surrendered to the will of God.

By the way, Sarah Hale was not the most positive person – and she certainly wasn't beyond sadness and grief. In fact, when she was 35 years she delivered their fifth and last child – and that same year her husband died rather suddenly.

For the rest of her life, she wore black clothing as a sign of her ongoing sorrow.

And it was after her husband's death that she convinced our president to invite the world to thank God.

### ***3. The third keyword is the word, sing.***

David goes on to tell us how to thank God by adding in ***verse 2b, Come into His presence/Come before Him (literally, come before His face) with joyful singing.***

A few moments ago you had the opportunity to do just this – with the congregation of the redeemed; you were given a chance to sing.

How'd you do?

Was it joyful? Or was it a chore? Was coming to this service one more *obligation* or one more *opportunity* to praise God?

Maybe you're like Joanne's son, I'll leave out the last name; her son asked her one Sunday on their way home, “Mommy, what's the highest number you have ever counted to?” She said, “I don't know; what's your's?” He said, “5,372.” She said, “Wow, but why'd you stop there?” He said, “Cause church was over.”

Have you ever thought about the fact that one of God's antidotes to ingratitude is joyful singing.

So:

- Shout joyfully – that's grateful action.
- Serve with gladness – that's a grateful attitude
- Come before Him with singing – that's grateful access.

John Phillips, the British expositor, captured this joy when he told of a young boy who was standing in London, in front of Buckingham Palace, tugging on the guard's jacket saying, “I want to see the king.” Of course, the guard didn't even flinch. And policemen were walking back and forth moving people along. “But I want to see the king,” he persisted. “Can't help that, sonny,” said the policeman. “You're not allowed in there.” About that time a well-dressed gentleman came along with an entourage and he overheard the conversation. “What's the matter, boy?” he asked. “I want to see the king,” the little boy replied. “Well, you must come with me,” said the older man. He held out his hand and the boy took it. To his surprise the policeman made no attempt to stop him, nor did the guards. Indeed, the guard sprang to attention and presented arms while the policeman unlocked the gate. In they went, along the corridors and right into the presence of the king. The little boy had taken hold of the hand of the Prince of Wales, the king's own son. That gave him access.<sup>ii</sup>

This is our privilege – we have access to God the Father because we are being held by the hand of His Son.

Now David answers the question “WHY?” Why do we thank God?

And it’s as if David says, “Don’t you know?!”

**Verse 3, “The Lord Himself is God.”**

In other words, He is to be praised, not just for what He does, but because of who He is.

He is God! That is enough.

Well, what kind of God is He?

David describes further down *in verse 5*. **He is good! His lovingkindness is everlasting** – in other words, He won’t change His mind, and He won’t forget His promises.

**Notice further in verse 5, His faithfulness is to all generations.**

In other words, generation after generation after generation, after generation He remains the same – He isn’t fickle, He is faithful.<sup>iii</sup>

We thank God because of who He is.

But that’s not all . . . we offer thanks to Him not only because of who He is, but because of what He has done.

**Take a closer look at verse 3, “It is He who has made us and not we ourselves.”**

In other words, God is the Creator, who crafted us.

You know what that means – you look precisely like He planned for you to look. He crafted you, inside and out, literally!

He wired you and gifted you.

You will not be able to joyfully praise God until you accept the fact that God made you according to His Divine plan. David wrote in another Psalm that God wove you together in your mother’s womb (**Psalm 139:13**).

Every ability you have, and every disability you have, were pre-meditated by God.

He gave you all the strengths you would need.

He gave you all the weaknesses you would need.

Your strengths would bring Him praise.

Your weaknesses would depend on His power.

He made you – and better still, He is still making you. He isn’t through . . . For God is the One, who is constantly putting forth His effort in you (Philippians 2:13 Wuest paraphrased).<sup>iv</sup>

By the way, He not only made you, but He also plans on keeping you.

That’s the next phrase – **verse 3, We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.**

I’m so glad David didn’t write, “We are His people and stallions in His stable.” “We are His people and eagles soaring in His heavens.”

No . . . we are His fearful, timid, ignorant, helpless, prone to wander . . . sheep.

But here’s the good news is, we are *His* sheep.

The devotional book entitled, *Springs in the Valley*, tells of a man who found a barn where Satan kept his seeds ready to be sown in the human heart. The man found that the seeds of discouragement were more numerous than any other seed. There were bags of them stacked everywhere. When he asked around, he learned that it was because the seeds of discouragement would grow almost anywhere. When one of the demons being questioned, reluctantly admitted that there was one place in which they could never get the seeds to take root or thrive. “And where is that?” asked the man. The demon replied, “In the heart of a grateful person.”<sup>v</sup>

You know, it really is impossible, to be, at the same time:

- Anxious and grateful;
- Proud and grateful;
- Selfish and grateful;
- Materialistic and grateful;
- Boastful and grateful;
- Bitter and grateful;
- Hateful and grateful . . . at the same time.

Maybe that’s why gratitude is to be one of the distinctive characteristics that sets us apart from the rest of the world; which is:

- Selfish;
- Proud;
- Materialistic;
- Boastful;
- Bitter;
- And hateful.

Since we’ve discovered that gratitude is a command – an act of the will – then it is something that must be embraced and pursued.

So make up your mind to follow this command – let’s all adjust our attitudes and shout to Him . . . serve Him . . . and sing to Him with gladness.

Why? Because of **who** He is – and because of **what** He has done.

He made us . . . and He is still making us . . . and in spite of everything and anything, He plans on keeping us . . . forever.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 11/22/2015 by Stephen Davey.

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i Adapted from Charles Swindoll, Living Beyond the Daily Grind (Word Publishing, 1988), p. 278

ii John Phillips, Exploring the Psalms, Volume 2 (Loizeaux Brothers, 1988), p. 101

iii Adapted from John Stott, Favorite Psalms (Moody Press, 1988), p. 94

iv Swindoll, p. 280

v Robert Morgan, Nelson's Complete Book of Stories (Thomas Nelson, 2000), p. 735