

Thanksgiving—Past, Present, and Future
Psalm 66

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Introduction: Thanksgiving is a wonderful holiday. Thanksgiving has always been among my favorite days of the year. Maybe that is because from a modern day celebration standpoint, the day is filled with two of my favorite activities—eating and football. Beyond that, and might I quickly add, greatly more important than food and football—Thanksgiving season holds an important place on the calendar for personal reasons. First, I asked Linett to marry me on a Thanksgiving Eve. Then, Josh was born around Thanksgiving (actually was due on Thanksgiving Day, but he came a little early.) Most importantly, as believers in Jesus, thanksgiving ought to be lived out in our lives every day, but I am thankful for a particular day and a particular season to think about and focus on thanksgiving.

There are many places in God’s Word that we could turn this morning, but I have been drawn into Psalm 66.

Text: ¹ Make a joyful shout to God, all the earth!

² Sing out the honor of His name;

Make His praise glorious.

³ Say to God,

“How awesome are Your works!

Through the greatness of Your power

Your enemies shall submit themselves to You.

⁴ All the earth shall worship You

And sing praises to You;

They shall sing praises to Your name.” Selah

⁵ Come and see the works of God;

He is awesome in His doing toward the sons of men.

⁶ He turned the sea into dry *land*;

They went through the river on foot.

There we will rejoice in Him.

⁷ He rules by His power forever;

His eyes observe the nations;

Do not let the rebellious exalt themselves. Selah

⁸ Oh, bless our God, you peoples!

And make the voice of His praise to be heard,

⁹ Who keeps our soul among the living,

And does not allow our feet to be moved.

¹⁰ For You, O God, have tested us;

You have refined us as silver is refined.

¹¹ You brought us into the net;

You laid affliction on our backs.

¹² You have caused men to ride over our heads;

We went through fire and through water;
But You brought us out to rich *fulfillment*.

- ¹³ I will go into Your house with burnt offerings;
I will pay You my vows,
¹⁴ Which my lips have uttered
And my mouth has spoken when I was in trouble.
¹⁵ I will offer You burnt sacrifices of fat animals,
With the sweet aroma of rams;
I will offer bulls with goats. Selah
- ¹⁶ Come *and* hear, all you who fear God,
And I will declare what He has done for my soul.
¹⁷ I cried to Him with my mouth,
And He was extolled with my tongue.
¹⁸ If I regard iniquity in my heart,
The Lord will not hear.
¹⁹ *But* certainly God has heard *me*;
He has attended to the voice of my prayer.
- ²⁰ Blessed *be* God,
Who has not turned away my prayer,
Nor His mercy from me!

Introduction: The Bible is not short on providing us lists for reasons to give thanks. For that matter, you probably do not even need help in preparing your own list. The vast majority of the Psalms lead us to some kind of meditation about thanksgiving. Psalm 66 gives us a way of putting our praise in the perspective of the present, past, and future.

Thanksgiving for the Past:

When we think about the past, we ought to be able to be thankful for...

1. God's Provision (Verse 6)—The Bible is a record of God's provision for us. David knew the record of God's faithfulness to Israel. What is your own record? What about the record of God's provision for you spiritually. Paul spoke in terms of God saving us from sin and Hell. We were once enemies of God, but God provided for us salvation.
2. Pain allowed by God (Verses 10-12)—As we think about the past, we can be thankful for even the pain. To thank God for the pain of life is certainly not our first reaction to the difficult experiences of life. Former football coach Tony Dungy has a young son who has a congenital disorder that prevents him from feeling pain.

Listen to Dungy's own words about what this has taught him:

"That sounds like it's good at the beginning, but I promise you it's not," Dungy said.

"We've learned a lot about pain in the last five years we've had Jordan. We've learned some hurts are really necessary for kids. Pain is necessary for kids to find out the difference between

what's good and what's harmful." Jordan, Dungy said, loves cookies. "Cookies are good," Dungy said, "but in Jordan's mind, if they're good out on the plate, they're even better in the oven. He will go right in the oven when my wife's not looking, reach in, take the rack out, take the pan out, burn his hands and eat the cookies and burn his tongue and never feel it. He doesn't know that's bad for him." Jordan, Dungy said, "has no fear of anything, so we constantly have to watch him."

The lesson learned, Dungy said, is simple. "You get the question all the time, 'Why does the Lord allow pain in your life? Why do bad things happen to good people? If God is a God of love, why does he allow these hurtful things to happen?'" Dungy said. "We've learned that a lot of times because of that pain, that little, temporary pain, you learn what's harmful. You learn to fear the right things. "Pain sometimes lets us know we have a condition that needs to be healed. Pain inside sometimes lets us know that spiritually we're not quite right and we need to be healed and that God will send that healing agent right to the spot. "Sometimes, pain is the only way that will turn us as kids back to the Father."

Thanksgiving for the Present:

When we think about right now, we ought to be able to be thankful for...

1. His awesome works. (Verses 3 and 5) There is no end to this list, so just come and see the awesome works of God.
2. His authority over the nations. (Verse 7)—It is good to know that God is in control. He is the one on the throne.
3. His keeping us alive. (Verse 9)—God's gift to us is to be able to live.

Thanksgiving for the Future

When we think about God's past provision and God's present activity in our lives, we ought to be able to thank Him for the future—some of it unknown, but as believers, some of it known. We thank God for the....

1. Possibilities of the Future. I think about these little children being dedicated this morning. Endless possibilities.
2. Promises of the Future.

So, what?

Many of you recognize this question. I don't want to leave us this morning without some concrete actions points. I want us to do more than just "think" and "thank," I really want us to do.

1. We worship. (Verses 13-15)

2. We witness. (Verse 16) We tell His name. This is more than just evangelism, although that is included. We tell all that God is doing.

A certain medical missionary in India served in a particular region where, for some unknown reason, many people were afflicted with a progressive blindness. The people were born with healthy vision, but something in the area caused people to lose their sight as they matured. This missionary developed a procedure which would arrest this progressive blindness. People would come to him who were going to spend their days blind, but leave with full vision. He said that not once was he ever told "thank you." However, this absence of thanks was not because of a lack of thankfulness, but instead because such a concept or word simply did not exist in their particular dialect. Instead, though, they would speak a word which simply meant, "I will tell your name." Wherever they went, they would tell the name of this missionary who had cured their blindness. They had received something so wonderful that they eagerly proclaimed his name. Shouldn't it be the same with us in our relationship with God? That's what the Psalmist is saying. Suddenly you realize that God has done something so wonderful that you can't keep it inside anymore. From the depths of your soul, you wish to "tell His name." And you do so with great joy!