

Sermon #1,050: Jeremiah 33:10-18

11-27-13 (Thanksgiving Vespers), Bethany-Princeton MN

FOR JESUS' SAKE, THE SACRIFICE OF PRAISE IS CONTINUALLY OFFERED

Prayer: Lord, we bring our thank-offerings to You, imperfect as our praise of You is, because You, our Savior and Lord, are the true Thank Offering who offered Yourself on the cross. By You everything lacking or impure in our thanks, praise and offerings is removed, and our prayers and praises are acceptable to God for Your sake. Thanks be to You for Your indescribable gift! Amen.

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ:

Thanksgiving is a sacrifice. Not the “I’m making a big sacrifice” kind, as in the grudging way you might let someone know that for their sake you sacrificed your TV time or a night out with friends, how much you sacrifice as a parent or a person working a holiday; that is a “sacrifice” we think is up to us, or optional.

But “thanksgiving” is an actual sacrifice to God. That’s what the Bible teaches. You may not think of it that way. It’s so easy to say. We say “it doesn’t cost anything to say thank you.” It’s so easy it can lose its meaning. If you don’t say thank you, people think you’re only guilty of being impolite. We nag our kids, “Did you remember to say thank you?” But it’s so much more than that.

When we heard in tonight’s epistle lesson about the requirement of Christians *“that giving of thanks be made,”* it actually goes all the way back to the book of Leviticus, all those laws and instructions for the sacrifices. One of them was the peace offering which, in some cases, would be offered specifically for thanksgiving. The Psalms show us when this happened: Repeatedly, in the middle of psalms of lament – when a person is praying for help, or is in distress or trouble or being mistreated by people or by life in general, and in the words of these psalms prays for deliverance and then promises, *“I will give You thanks in the great assembly; I will praise You among many people” (Ps 35:18)* – in the Old Testament world, this meant that after God answered the prayer for help, a man

would go to the temple with his family. You wouldn't just say thank you to God privately, but *"in the great assembly,"* in public worship. An animal of their own would be sacrificed, they would bring four kinds of bread to be dedicated, and they would sit down at a table with the priests, in God's presence, for a festive meal. It included presenting the sacrifice with the singing of a psalm of praise to God. All of this is summed up as the *"sacrifice of thanksgiving."*

The issue in tonight's reading from Jeremiah is that they were worried that this could never happen again.

They worried that there would never again be a sacrifice of praise, that the voice of praise would go silent. God's people had been carried away captive to Babylon and God brought them back after 70 years to a desolate, empty land, where nothing was the same. The Lord says to them, **"You say of this place, 'It is desolate, without man and without beast,' "** the beasts or animals being important for the sacrifices. And God makes a promise to them: **"Again there shall be heard in this place ... the voice of those who will say, 'Praise the LORD of hosts, for the LORD is good, for His mercy endures forever,' and of those who will bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the LORD."**

Does that mean these sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving will be done in the same way? No. But it does not mean that the voice of praise would go silent. How would God make His promise come true that they would **"sacrifice continually"**? He says, **"I will cause to grow up to David a Branch of righteousness."** This is Jesus, the Righteous Branch, the root of Jesse, David's Son.

The sacrifices of praise, the thank-offerings, were not over. They were to be fulfilled, in Jesus. This makes the difference for you in your giving of thanks.

You may not always realize it, but your giving of thanks is a sacrifice. It is sacrificial worship – something you do for God. So it is part of doing the Law. It

is a duty. It is a form of your obedience to God. Comes right from the 10 Commandments. According to the Second Commandment to not take the Lord's name in vain, you are not only to call upon Him in every trouble and pray, but also to praise Him and give thanks. Do you do this? Do you bring Him this offering? You pray all the time for help, but then you forget to bring Him thanks.

When this is true of you, then you are the desolate empty land – empty of the praise that should be poured out to God. The voice of praise does go silent where you are concerned. Too often in its place is complaining, counting off all that you don't have or listing what others have, and then there is all the misdirected praise – praise of self or wanting to be praised, or obsessing over who gets credit for the good and blame for the bad. The actual sacrifice of praise, the actual thank-offerings that should ascend to God, die on our lips. Doesn't it go silent?

As judged by the Law, that is true. But thankfully the Law doesn't get the last word. As God promised in Jeremiah 33, He raised up a Branch of Righteousness in whom nothing was lacking, no righteousness was left undone or unspoken. This is Jesus. Jesus came to be our Righteousness, to be your Righteousness.

He came to do what you can't and don't do. Not only did He offer the perfect sacrifice of praise continually, not only did He offer thanks to God – as the Gospels report more than once – but the thank-offering that He offered up was Himself. He became the sacrifice, the perfectly acceptable sacrifice.

What this means now is that He is always pleading for you with His blood. It is a never-ending prayer for you and for all of His Church. The angels in heaven rejoice when one sinner is forgiven. So there is never-ending prayer and praise, and the one who offers this up to the Father is Jesus. You simply join in. You join Him. Your words join with Jesus' words, and there is never anything lacking. It is all for Jesus' sake. In His realm, there is not even any awareness of

any unthankfulness. That is all gone, and only praise is left. He takes away the nervousness over every little thing you might not have done, or might not do perfectly, He shows you His cross which says He did it for you.

All that is left is for you to join Him in the praise that goes on and on, not under pressure to do it but knowing that in Him it is always acceptable to God and pure and perfect in His sight. As we sang, *"The voice of prayer is never silent, Nor dies the strain of praise away."* It begins and ends with Jesus, and it never ends.

This is your sacrifice of praise, your thank-offering: Jesus Himself.

You don't offer Him up. He offered Himself up, He gives Himself to you, and He brings you with Him. Your praise and thanksgiving is not merely something you say. It is what you are, what Jesus makes of you, as Romans 12:1 says: *"a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God."* Amen!