

Reflections by the Pond

THE WRITINGS OF DAVID S LAMPEL



MORE THAN JUST WORDS

Let my accusers be clothed with dishonor,
And let them wrap themselves with their own shame as with a robe.
With my mouth I will give thanks abundantly to Yahweh;
And in the midst of many I will praise Him.
For He stands at the right hand of the needy,
To save him from those who judge his soul.

Psalm 109:29–31

Let the world have its sterile, impotent definition of "thanksgiving." The Christian's stance is to be utterly different, in that our thanksgiving is to be both spiritual and physical; it is to ignite both praise to God and earthly works in His name; more than simply a verbal expression of gratitude, it is to be a life-changing commitment to serve the Lord from whence these blessings have come.

Something More

LET US BE HONEST: The principal motivating factor for the American Thanksgiving holiday is food. Food and lots of it. Frankly, in a world filled with either resentment of or outright hate for western culture, and specifically the United States, it is not necessarily a bad thing to occasionally celebrate our bounty, even our wealth. Americans need not be ashamed of our bounty; it did not suddenly drop down onto us from the sky, but is the result of the inherent structure, free-market system, and societal freedoms built into our nation since its inception. And this is a nation that sends more food to other nations than any other in the world, both as a commercial exporter and in humanitarian donations. So we need not apologize for our annual indulgence.

For the Christian, however, thanksgiving is to be something more.

Far more.

A FOLLOWER OF CHRIST can be grateful for any number of things—for family, for good friends, for food on the table and a roof over one’s head. All well and good, and righteous to a degree. But the Christian has something for which he or she is to be far more grateful, for which he or she is to offer the highest and most earnest thankfulness—not just on the third Thursday of every November, but every day.

I will give thanks to You, O Lord my God, with all my heart,

And will glorify Your name forever.

For Your lovingkindness toward me is great,

And You have delivered my soul from Sheol below.

Psalm 86:12–13

Our first reason to express thanksgiving is that we have a God who loves us. It is not enough to be grateful that we “are loved”—as if we are thankful for the warm, cozy feeling it gives us,

as if ignoring the *source* of such love to focus on the good feelings it gives us. No, we are to be thankful to God for the undeserved *chesed* (deeds of kindness and devotion) our gracious God pours out upon us every day.

How very much we take this for granted. How very much we just assume it is the right and proper order of the universe that God would love us. But we should be staggered by this incredible truth; that the Lord and Creator of all that is, Almighty God, would so love us should force us to our knees in humble worship and praise, for it has nothing to do with our qualities and everything to do with who He is. As Moses explained to Israel,

“Yahweh did not set His affection on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because Yahweh loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your fathers, Yahweh brought you out with a strong hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”

Deuteronomy 7:7–8

Put succinctly, this means that the reason God loves Israel is that God loves Israel. He chose them to be His people not for any qualities in themselves, but solely because of *His* qualities of lovingkindness and grace.

And the same holds true for those who belong to Him through Christ Jesus. Out of His love God chose us, He predestined us—by name—before any of us were even born.

Therefore do not be ashamed of either the witness about our Lord or me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus from all eternity...

2 Timothy 1:8–9

That is something for which we all should be daily, eternally, thankful.

GOD'S LOVE FOR US is not an end in itself, but bears a tangible result. From deep eternity before time He loved us, so that into deep eternity after time we could live with Him.

For Your lovingkindness toward me is great,
And You have delivered my soul from Sheol below.

Psalm 86:13

Though believers are born predestined to be accepted and loved by God, we are born nonetheless in and into corruption. He may know us and love us, but from an earthly perspective we will be ignorant of that affection until the day the Holy Spirit claims us for the Father because of the atonement of Christ.

Until that moment—again, from a human perspective—we are inexorably headed to eternal death, a living death in the lake of fire.

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sits upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. Then I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged from the things which were

written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them, and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Revelation 20:11–15

The follower of Christ, however, convicted, informed, and confirmed by the Holy Spirit, will not meet and need not fear such a hideous judgment. The Father's love, manifested most completely in the sacrifice of His own Son, guarantees an eternal life of radiant, resurrected joy dwelling in communion with both Father and Son.

THE CHRISTIAN'S THANKSGIVING—and Thanksgiving—is to be informed and energized by these two truths: the Father's steady, unflinching affection and the promise of an eternity with Him, "delivered...from Sheol below."

And we are to live out that thanksgiving every day of our lives. ♦

*Now thank we all our God
with heart and hands and voices,
who wondrous things has done,
in whom his world rejoices;
who from our mothers' arms
has blessed us on our way
with countless gifts of love,
and still is ours today.*

*O may this bounteous God
through all our life be near us,
with ever joyful hearts
and blessed peace to cheer us,
to keep us in his grace,
and guide us when perplexed,
and free us from all ills
of this world in the next.*

*All praise and thanks to God
the Father now be given,
the Son and Spirit blest,
who reign in highest heaven
the one eternal God,
whom heaven and earth adore;
for thus it was, is now,
and shall be evermore.*

(Martin Rinkart (1636); Translator: Catherine Winkworth)