

Genesis 8:18-22

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ Jesus,

I'll guess there's a Thanksgiving Day that stands out in your mind. A family who sent their regrets made it to the gathering after all. An intense joy grabbed you. The turkey turned out better than usual. An event before Thanksgiving Day made you especially grateful. You might call it a Thanksgiving like none other.

Scripture has many times of thanksgiving like none other. One that jumps to my mind, though we usually don't think of it this way, is when Jesus appeared to his disciples after his resurrection. Another is when King Solomon and the entire assembly of Israel gathered for the dedication of the temple. They sacrificed so many sheep and cattle that they could not be counted (1 Kings 8:5). Add individuals who stand out in their example of giving thanks, such as the one leper (out of 10) who returned to thank Jesus for healing him.

Out of all the times we could come up with, I suggest this section from Genesis 8 is **Thanksgiving Like None Other**. In it we see **(I) A Grateful Heart Gives Thanks and (II) The Lord's Reaction to Giving Thanks**.

I

I've learned a string of cloudy days can get to me. My mood brightens when the sun shines. So I don't know how well I would have handled 40 cloudy days in a row. That's what life was like for Noah and his family for the 40 days after the Lord shut the door of the ark. And they weren't thin clouds, but dark ones with a continuous torrential downpour.

The result of that downpour was water that lifted the ark, heavily laden as it was with every kind of animal and bird. The water kept increasing until everything was under water – more than 20 feet above the tallest mountain. For 150 days, Noah and family saw nothing but water outside the ark. Not that they were sitting around looking out a window. They were busy feeding the animals and cleaning their stalls.

5 months after entering the ark, it rested on the mountains of Ararat. 3 months later, the tops of the mountains poked out of the water. It took another 4 months for the water to finish receding. 375 days after entering the ark, *Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds—everything that moves on the earth—came out of the ark, one kind after another (vv.18-19)*.

If you thought it took me a long time to describe the Flood, can you imagine a year and 10 days inside the ark? What a relief once they and all the animals were out. A pristine new world stretched out before them. Their hearts swelled with gratitude.

No wonder *Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it (v.20)*. This was more than an hour-long worship service. First they build an altar large enough for multiple sacrifices. Then they had to come up with enough dry wood for fuel. Finally, they prepared and offered all those animals and birds.

While we have never gone through anything even close to the Flood, we too have many reasons for our hearts to swell with gratitude: our family surrounding us, our homes protecting us, food filling freezers and pantries, our jobs through which we serve and receive an income, stores overflowing with goods, the storms of life which the Lord has brought us through,... There isn't enough time to list *every good and perfect gift...coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights (James 1:17)*. Above all, the fact that since *the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10)*, he has sought and saved us, just as he did Zacchaeus.

No wonder our giving thanks to the Lord lasts longer than this Festival of Thanksgiving. His blessings to us are new every morning, noon and night. Our thanksgiving responds accordingly.

Notice there's more than gratitude in Noah's heart. The burnt offerings he sacrificed indicate this. To understand the significance, consider how much of a burnt offering is left. Nothing. All is consumed in the fire. Some sacrifices, as the Law of Moses later spelled out, provided meat for the person offering the sacrifice. A burnt offering was totally for the Lord. Which signifies its meaning. As the offering is totally for the Lord, so the person offering it is fully dedicated to the Lord. In this way Noah was expressing his complete dedication to the Lord who had saved him and his family.

Isn't that an interesting thought to bring into thanksgiving? We know the Lord has saved us. He has saved us from a fate worse than a world-wide flood. He has saved us from an eternity of punishment. That's what we deserve because of the sinful inclination of our hearts. Out of his mercy and lovingkindness, Jesus has endured our punishment and covered us with his righteousness. He intercedes for us before his Father with the result that his Father has declared us not guilty of all our sins. He saved us. And that fills us with the desire to wholly dedicate ourselves and our lives to him, now and forever.

II

Can you smell the turkey cooking yet? Ok, there are no turkeys cooking around here, but can you imagine that smell? Breathe in deeply as you enjoy that aroma and your stomach begins to growl. Does it bring a smile to your face?

The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma (v.21). As the aroma of the roasting turkey brings pleasure to you, so Noah's sacrifice brought pleasure to the Lord. Such is the Lord's reaction to giving thanks. Maybe that's mystifying, since burned meat isn't a pleasant smell, as many cooks have discovered. This is Scripture's way of describing the Lord's pleasure with Noah. He saw Noah's faith behind his gratitude and dedication which prompted his offering this sacrifice.

When was the last time you thought of the Lord as pleased with your acts of faith? More often we are conscious of what we did wrong than the Lord's pleasure with our fruits of faith. Yet the fact is that our heavenly Father, looking through the lens of his Son, thinks, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Use that picture as an encouragement to increase in such acts of faith.

The Lord's reaction to Noah's sacrifice was, "*Never again will I curse the ground because of man, ... And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done. As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease*" (vv.21-22).

Does the Lord's reasoning surprise you? *Because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood (v.21).* That's the reason the Lord sent the Flood: *The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and the every inclination of the thoughts of his heart were only evil all the time (Ge 6:5).* The reasoning didn't change, so why the change in dealing with mankind?

The Flood hadn't changed hearts. Noah and his family still had sinful natures opposed to God. Their descendants would also. As we look within our hearts, we see those evil inclinations hiding in plain sight. Too often they come bubbling out into evil thoughts, words and acts. As we confessed at the beginning of the service, "We often grumble and complain instead of giving thanks. We are eager to receive worldly wealth while we ignore his richer blessings of grace, love and peace which come through the gospel. These and all our sins we confess..."

If you've ever wondered why the Lord doesn't use a disaster to get peoples' attention, here's the reason. A disaster doesn't change hearts. When the Lord permits troubles in our lives, do they change our hearts for the better? Or do we meet them with sinful reactions similar to, "why me, God?" Not a disaster, but only the gospel will change hearts.

For two reasons the Lord promised to never curse the earth again. First, to fulfill his promise to send the Savior to redeem the world. Second, looking beyond Jesus' coming, to fulfill his promise to spread the gospel to all peoples and nations.

How grateful we are for this promise. Indeed, Jesus has redeemed us from sin, death and the devil. He has set us free from all guilt and covered us with his perfection. For a daily reminder of that, do what one grandmother did. She wrote on her dresser mirror, "I am baptized." Every morning when she woke, she was reminded of who she really was and what it meant for her. Your baptism has made you the precious children of God, holy and dearly loved. That alone compels a daily offering of thanks. On top of that, the Lord is pleased with your offering of thanks. And his reaction, out of his grace, is to pour out his blessings on you.

Noah and his family had a mighty good reason for giving thanks to the Lord and dedicating their lives to him. Perhaps you agree with me that this is thanksgiving like none other. Don't stop there. For when we add up all the good and perfect gifts from our heavenly Father (more than we can count), then mix in the redemption Jesus has given us, that compels us to make every day thanksgiving like none other. Amen.