

Counting God's Blessings with Thanksgiving Psalm 89:1-2

Good morning! Happy Thanksgiving! Happy Birthday! Today, we're celebrating Thanksgiving and the birthday of this church. This church has thrived through the years because of God's goodness and faithfulness.

In recognition of that, I'd like to share a message on the faithfulness of God. In this message I'd like us to count the ways we can be thankful to God always. Specifically, why we can count on God always. I'll be going through a number of passages in the book of Psalms because it is a book in the Bible that is replete with thanksgiving and praises to the faithfulness of God. How many Psalms are there in the Bible? 150. What is the longest Psalm? 119. It is exactly 176 verses Long Because of Its Poetic Structure. You see, it is in an alphabet acrostic. There are 22 stanzas or paragraphs in this Psalm, one for each of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet in order. Each of the stanzas has 8 verses which also begin with the same letter. That makes $22 \times 8 =$ exactly 176 verses. We'll be going through this psalm verse by verse this morning. Just kidding.

Now, what is the shortest psalm? Psalm 117. It has only two verses. Interestingly, this Psalm is also the middle chapter of the Bible.

David wrote most of the Psalms. He wrote at least 73 psalms. The rest of the psalms were written by at least 7 people, including Moses and Solomon. So, as I said I'll be talking about the faithfulness of God mostly quoting from the book of Psalms.

I've entitled this message "Counting God's Blessings with Thanksgiving". Because truly, God has blessed this church despite the challenges we faced through the years. There were ups and downs and there were times we wondered what was going on. But thank God, God is faithful always. Amen?

Let me share a brief history of Fil-Am Church. It was in November 17, 1996, when Fil-Am Church was planted here in Springfield by two missionaries from the Philippines, Pastor Romy and Kaye Capuli. Since the start they reached out and ministered to mostly Filipino Americans in the community and nurtured this church for 14 years. In 2010, they bade goodbye to the church to obey God's calling for them to start their own ministry to children called Crossover which is based in the Philippines.

Before they left, God had prepared a couple which were myself and my wife. One year before Pastor Romy and Tita Kaye left, God moved me and Bel and our two young children at the time, Ally and Eze, from New York to here in Virginia. We started to come to this church because I know Pastor Romy even before we came. He didn't know we were coming, however. Anyway, to make a long story short, a year after we came, the church called me to be their pastor. And that's why we're here. And since then, God added an additional member to our family, Eza.

Today, we're marking 14 years since we came to this church. So, 14 years of Pastor Romy, 14 years of me, and that's why today this church is 28 years. What will happen in the next 14 years, I don't know. It's a chapter that is still being written, at least in our perspective. God knows what's going to happen and he has a plan for this church. And we know that plan is good because God is faithful. Amen?

Say to the person next to you, "God is faithful and he has a good plan for you!"

Since we're celebrating Thanksgiving weekend, let me ask you a question: Why did the turkey cross the road? (if you guess it right, you get a turkey, seriously) It was Thanksgiving Day, and he wanted people to think he was a chicken. Then, there's the turkey who lamented to another turkey, "Dude! I started

a Twitter account last year and was glad to gather a ton of online followers. But, this Thanksgiving they all want to have me over for dinner!” Turkeys go through bad times, too, not only people.

Seriously, life is not easy. Anybody in pain has a hard time being grateful. How can you be thankful if the doctor just told you it’s cancer? How can you be thankful if the person you loved the most just walked in and said, “I don’t love you anymore; I’m leaving you for somebody else.” How can you be thankful when you have a chronic illness that just isn’t getting any better? How can you be thankful when you’ve been laid off and you’ve gone to fourteen job interviews and they’ve all turned you down? How can you be thankful when your dream has collapsed? Or the economic tsunami just wiped out everything you’ve earned in your lifetime? Yet the Bible tells us to always be thankful. In 1 Thessalonians 5:18, it says this “Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.” It’s a command from God. And it’s his will for each of us. Because you know what? God is faithful. He will bring us out of the dark times in our lives. Psalm 30:5 says: “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.”

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The Bible is very clear on the fact that even in the lives of the finest Christians, there will come times when there will be sorrow and weeping. And in those times - psalms of praise and thanksgiving will not come easily.

But in the midst of those difficult times, there is danger. That danger is that we might turn away from God rather than turning toward Him And without an effort to seek God in our sorrow, there might NEVER come a time of joy in the morning.

So, today, I just want to remind you that we can always count on the fact that God is good, in good times and in bad. And we must heave a sigh of relief that our God is good, knowing that in the midst of pain, he is there beside us.

Let us then count the ways in which God is faithful and why we can count on him always.

1. You can count on God in times of trouble.

Psalm 91:4 says, *“He will cover You with His feathers, and under His wings you will find refuge; His faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.”*

Have you ever felt like you want to take cover? Because life has been difficult. Problems abound and you’re being hit right and left. Have you ever had that feeling of going away? In a situation like that, our first impulse should be to call on the Lord to cover us because that’s what the psalmist says God is going to do in our times of trouble. Yet, some people say, “Can God really help me with this? My problems seem so insurmountable.” If you’ve ever felt this way, you’re greatly underestimating the power of God. Trust me, God can handle your problems. You won’t be inconveniencing Him. It’s not too much for God to take. Call upon the Lord to cover you, to shield you. He’s waiting to hear from you.

Paul reminds us in **Philippians 4:6-7** *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”* That’s a great reminder for us to make our requests known to God, and His peace will come to assure us of his presence. His peace will be like a helmet and a shield that will protect us against the attacks of the enemy.

Usually, the enemy comes when we are facing problems. He whispers to our ears, “God doesn’t love you. He doesn’t care about you. He has abandoned you.” He is hoping that his lies will affect our hearts so that we will lose our faith in God. But the great deceiver, Satan, cannot attack anyone who comes to the Lord in prayer. You see, the devil is most afraid when he sees you kneeling.

The verse says that under his wings you will find refuge. The psalmist compares God to a mother hen or a mother eagle who are always ready to protect her children with her wings.

You see, when you're in the middle of a mess, your world seems very small. It feels like your problems are overwhelming you. It feels like everything is closing in on you -- like your days are numbered and your options are limited. Have you been there?

God wants to give you refuge. He wants to put you in a place where you feel safe and secure. Psalm 46:1 says, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble."

If you're in the middle of a mess, call on Him. Ask for His help - and trust and believe His help is on the way.

The truth is, when life turns on you, the natural reaction is typically fear. Fear of how you'll survive, fear of what others will think, fear of how your enemies will laugh, fear of what next. It's only natural to respond this way, but when you have confidence in God's goodness, you don't have to be afraid.

Psalm 118:6 says, "The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?" What can man do to you? What's the worst that can happen? You'll be criticized, you'll be laughed at, you'll be ridiculed? You'll be without a job, you'll be broke? The truth is even if the worst that could possibly happen does happen, it's not enough to separate you from God. Again, listen to Paul's words — "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 8:38-39)

No matter what kind of mess we find ourselves in, nothing can change the fact that God loves you. He is for you and He desires to help you.

Everybody goes through messes. Everybody has problems. Everybody deals with heartbreak. Some of the messes we bring into our lives by our own bad choices, some of the messes are caused by others, some are the result of living life—but everyone goes through this; none of us are exempt. But know this – God is here right now, He's with you, He's for you, He will help you.

Someone once wrote:

“Only God could turn

A TRIal into a TRIumph.

A VICTim into a VICTory.

A MESS into a MESSage.

A TEST into a TESTimony.”

If it weren't for those trials, those messes, those tests in our life, we wouldn't have any messages or testimonies of God's triumph in our lives.

I've got some great stories about how God has done mighty things in my life. But those stories came about when I was going through the roughest and most uncertain times in my life.

And I love those stories. Mostly I love them because they don't brag on me - they brag on God and what He's done in my life.

To take this point a little further, here's the second thing I want you to notice.

2. You can count on God when you can count on no one else.

Psalm 57:3 says, *“He sends from Heaven and saves me, rebuking those who hotly pursue me. God sends forth His love and His faithfulness.”*

Sometimes when we're in a mess, we're tempted to say, “God isn't for me, He's not going to help me.” And along with that, we may think . . . “And there's no one on my side.” Both statements are wrong. God is for you, and there are people who are for you, too.

You're not as alone as you sometimes let yourself think. Now, you may not have the support of everyone, or you may find some people disagree with you, but you do have people in your life who are on your side, who care about you, and who want to be there for you. God is working with them and working through Christ to give you the strength you need to get through any mess that you might face.

But I want to make a distinction here. The people in your life are just people -- they're as fallible as you are. They make as many mistakes as you make. They have as many problems as you have. And sometimes some of them will fail to be there when you expect them to be.

There will be times when people let you down. There will be times when you call on friends and they don't come through for you. There will be times when you ask for help and they just don't give it. There will be times when they don't answer your calls and ignore your emails or your FB message. It's a fact of life. But God will not let you down.

In Psalm 118:8 it says, "It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man."

I want you to understand that just because people leave you hanging doesn't mean God will. God will be there for you. You can count on Him when you can't count on anyone else.

We tend to look at those around us as our sources: My boss is my source for money; my spouse is my source for happiness and security; my friends are my source for entertainment; my church is my source for my spiritual needs, and on and on.

That's not true; there will be times when each fails to measure up to the standard. They are not your source. God is your source. Amen? It is better to trust in the Lord than to trust in man.

Psalm 118:9 says, “It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes.” It is good for us to remember, even after the elections, we cannot put our hope in a prince, or a princess as the case may be. Yes, we may have voted for the candidate who we feel has the best chance of making a difference in our lives. But our hope is not in our government.

David reminds us in Psalm 20:7 “Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.” You can count on God when you can't count on anyone else—and that includes Uncle Sam. Our trust must be in the Lord!

If you want to get centered in God during the middle of a mess in your life, you need to call upon the Lord in your distress. Put your trust in your Him. Quit looking to others to meet your needs and solve your problems.

Which brings us to the third reason why God is good.

3. You can count on God to make your life count for eternity.

Psalm 89:1-2 says, “I will sing of the Lord’s great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations. I will declare that your love stands firm forever, that you have established your faithfulness in heaven itself.”

Now, I’ve been talking about our messes and troubles and testings. Some people are not able to hold up during those times. They waste their life away. Sadly, some people go to the extreme of ending their lives because they feel that life is no longer worth living for. They throw in the towel, so to speak. We know of famous celebrities who ended up this way. But the psalmist here talks about praising God forever. The psalmist here is not just talking about hyperboles or exaggerating things. I believe he believes that he will live forever. He attributes this to the faithfulness of God which is forever. And because of that, he will be forever grateful to God.

Folks, I want you to leave this place brimming with joy and excitement about life. I want you to have hope that when bad times come, and we know they will it's just a matter of time, that you can stand up in the midst of them. That you can face any challenge that life throws at you. Let me explain.

In Psalm 118:22, David writes, "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes." Who do you think he is referring to as the stone the builders rejected? Let's turn to Acts 4:11 which was written hundreds of years later. In this verse, the apostle Peter is standing before the religious leaders of Israel who were persecuting him and the other believers and tells them, "Jesus is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.'"

Clearly, David was prophesying about the coming Messiah. This is the reason why Psalm 118 is also called a messianic psalm. So, David looked forward to the coming of the Messiah. And to him, the coming of the Messiah was so real he regarded it as already occurring in his day. He says in verse 24, "The Lord has done it this very day; let us rejoice today and be glad."

Like David, are you glad about what God has done? God has done the best and greatest thing there is. He sent his son Jesus to save us from our sins. And to fix the mess we're in. Going back to Peter, the next thing he said to the Jewish religious leaders was, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

Who are you trusting to save you and clean up your mess? We saw already that we cannot trust anyone except God alone. Only God knows the troubles you're in and he's ready to lend a helping hand. You must, however, reach out to him as he reaches out to you. His invitation is open. He invites you to put your faith in his son Jesus as your Lord and Savior. He was rejected by the religious leaders. They didn't think that his death on the cross was worth anything. But his death is the

very thing that would have saved them and would save you, if you acknowledge that Jesus died for you.

The Bible says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

So, it is not about us. Not about the bad things we’ve done or even the good things because they don’t count as far as our salvation is concerned. Only what counts is the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. If you believe this good news about Jesus, then your life will count for eternity. Because Jesus says, “Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.”

Do you want your life to count for eternity? It starts today when you put your faith in Christ alone.

Have you been able to lean on God in the midst of your trials and hardships?

If so... then realize that God’s faithfulness in that dark moment in your life gives you the power to have a testimony. A message. A message that can change the lives of others forever.

Let me share with you the story of Charlotte Elliott who had been an invalid from her youth. Her handicap filled her with resentment and anger. And one day, when a preacher was visiting her home, she let loose on him about her bitterness at what she had to live with.

The preacher listened to her but – instead of comforting her - he challenged her. He told her that what she needed to do was give her life totally to God. To come to Him just as she was, with all her bitterness and anger.

As you can imagine, she didn’t like that. She resented what seemed to be an almost callous attitude on his part, but God spoke to her through him, and she committed her life to the Lord.

Each year on the anniversary of her decision, that preacher wrote Charlotte a letter encouraging her to be strong in her faith. But even as a Christian she had doubts and struggles. What bothered her most was her inability to effectively get out and serve the Lord. Her brother had become a successful preacher and evangelist. But Charlotte felt that her health and physical condition prevented her from helping him.

Then in 1836, on the 14th anniversary of her conversion, she decided to write a song about her faith in God. One of the verses goes this way:

“Just as I am, tho’ tossed about
With many a conflict, many a doubt,
Fightings and fears within, without,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!”
“Just As I Am”

That hymn of faith has become one of the most powerful invitation songs of the church. Years later, her brother said this: "In the course of a long ministry I hope I have been permitted to see some fruit of my labors, but I feel far more has been done by a single hymn of my sister's, "Just As I Am."

Charlotte's time of testing gave her a testimony.

And the mess in her life gave birth to a message.

Would you come to the Lord this morning to ask for God's help and grace so that your testing may give you a testimony and the mess in your life may give birth to a message for others to hear so that Jesus will be glorified.