

1. The Call to Give Thanks
 - a. “Give thanks” (v1)
 - i. The word is not the usual word for thanks, but is the word for “acknowledge and verbally assent”
 1. It is sometimes used in reference to sins, where it takes the meaning “confess” or “acknowledge”
 2. Therefore, the idea is that one agrees with the valuation being expressed in the apodosis – “His love never ends”
 - ii. “Gratitude stands at the beginning and the end of the life of faith”
 - iii. It is not merely to “be thankful” or to “be grateful”, but rather to *express* that gratitude verbally – to speak it *to someone*
 1. The other forms of the verb mean “to shoot” (an arrow) or “to throw”
 - a. The idea is that we are to throw our words of agreement, of praise, to someone
 2. The “someone” is listed numerous times in numerous ways
 - b. It is a command to give thanks
 - i. We are not accustomed to being commanded to actually give thanks
 1. We feel that it should be spontaneous
 2. We often feel that something commanded is, by necessity, without heartfelt genuineness
 - a. But this is not true at all
 - b. Something does not need to be spontaneous to be true, genuine, and heartfelt
 - c. Obedience to the commands of God are true, genuine, and heartfelt, even when not spontaneous
 - i. Our songs do not need to be spontaneous to be truly sung from the heart
 - ii. Our prayers do not need to be spontaneous to be truly implored from the heart
 - iii. Our preaching does not need to be spontaneous to be truly declared from the heart
 - ii. How do you actually generate gratitude?
 1. A command to give thanks does not necessitate a truly grateful heart, however, does it?
 2. The Psalmist gives numerous reasons *why* we are to give thanks to the Lord in three ways:
 - a. by recounting various *wondrous* characteristics and works of God
 - b. by remembering “causative” connections, i.e. “because”, which indicate a reason why we are to give thanks
 - c. by repetition – “His love is forever”
2. We Give Thanks Because of Wonder
 - a. v4 describes the generality of God’s character and works which inspire a sense of awe: “to the one who alone does great wonders”
 - i. “Wonders” is a word which means “an act which causes awe, wonder, astonishment, and delight in all of its onlookers”
 - ii. This is the verse which frames the works which God has done, so that we would open our eyes and behold the *wonders* of God
 - b. Look at Creation (vv5-9)
 - i. “Overwhelming gaity, insupportable grandeur, somber desolation are flung at you [in Nature]. Make what you can of them, if you must make at all. The only imperative that nature utters is, ‘Look. Listen. Attend.’” – C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*
 - ii. The heavens above (v5)
 1. The beauty, immensity, and sheer magnitude of Creation compels us to wonder, to imagine, to delightful awe

2. There is a grandeur within the Natural world which explains to us what is meant by the word “wonder” and the word “glory”
- iii. The earth and the waters (v6)
 1. ‘hammered out’
 - a. The ‘hammer marks’ of the Maker’s artistry compel us to fear God, to honor God, and to give Him thanks (cf. Romans 1)
 2. We learn how to wonder by seeing the ‘hammer marks’ in Creation
 - a. We feel our smallness in the light of the wonders
 - b. ‘Nature has within her that which compels us to invent giants.’ – C.S. Lewis, *In Other Worlds*
- iv. The astronomical bodies (vv8-9)
 1. Sun for light by day
 - a. Do we take for granted that the sun rises every morning and miss the *miracle* that it comes back up?
 - b. Are so accustomed to the wonders of what God has made that we don’t even look at them as such anymore?
 2. Moon & Stars for light by night
- v. These are all allusions to the Creation event and the **covenant that God made with Adam**, both the promise of a curse for disobedience, but also of a Curse-breaking offspring who would crush the head of the deceiver
- c. Look at Redemption (vv10-20)
 - i. The Psalmist recalls the Exodus – where God flew in and plucked His people from their slavery and oppression in Egypt
 - ii. He came to save them – intervened into human history in order to redeem His people from such slavery
 1. Vanquished their enemies (v10,17-20)
 - a. The ten plagues were a visible throw-down of Egypt’s gods, proving that YHWH is the “God of gods” and “Lord of lords”
 - b. The defeat of Canaanite kings, great and mighty ones, was His wondrous work
 - i. None of these rescues were because Israel was great and mighty, but because God worked wonders over nature and over men
 2. “brought out” His people from oppression and dominion of abusive powers (v11)
 - a. God rescued and led His people out of Egypt
 - b. A pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day
 - c. Gave them the Mosaic Law to reveal to them their great neediness and His great holiness
 3. Split the Red Sea in half, taking them through the waters of death by an unforeseen path of safety and security (v13-14)
 4. In the same act He “utterly shook out” His enemies by wrapping them up in the waters of death (v15)
 5. He led His people through the dry wilderness wanderings (v16) and gave them His **covenant through Moses**
- d. Look at His Provision (v25)
 - i. This is what the Scriptures call God’s *mercy*, His kind provision to all the weak.
 - ii. “He gives all flesh food” (v25)
 1. This is a direct allusion to God’s **covenant given to Noah**, whereby God sees that “all flesh” had become corrupt and judgment was vindicated, then “all flesh” was destroyed by flood, then God promised that “all flesh” would not be destroyed by water again
- iii. God has proven good even to His enemies by providing for their needs
 1. Look! And wonder that we have food on the table, clothes on our backs, clean water to drink!
 2. Look at His mercy and wonder that God provides for us, even when we are wicked, and thoughtless, and demeaning of Him.
- e. Look at His Adoption (v21-22)
 - i. “Inheritance” – **covenant given to Abraham**, of a place of belonging and security

- ii. He gave His people a home, a belonging, a security
 - iii. 1 John 3:1-3 “SEE...”
 - f. You can see allusions to four different covenants here which God made in His love for His people
 - i. It is God’s faithful an covenant love which is expounded over and over again
 - g. God is to be praised because He has done all of this, and we do not deserve it (v23-24)
 - i. “We are in humiliated condition”
 - 1. The first time that “we” are mentioned is in v23
 - 2. God works for us because He remembered us even though we are humbled and low and so “not-wondrous”
 - a. In fact, we broke our covenant obligations, *but God has remained faithful to His*
 - ii. When you place the wondrous things of God next to “low estate” of us, you will nurture a sense of gratitude – a proper view of reality
 - 1. Reality of God’s immense power and my infinitesimal powerlessness cultivates gratitude and praise to God
 - a. The moment when I start to reckon that I am wonderful and powerful, my gratitude and my joy dies
 - 2. Reality of God’s immense love in redemption and my infinitesimal unworthiness of it nurtures gratitude and love for God in return
 - a. The moment when I start to reckon that God owes me redemption, my love for God and others will die, too
 - h. Gratitude strengthens relationships when we cultivate this double truth: wonder at the goodness of the other and wonder at the humble condition of myself.
 - i. Try it in any relationship
 - 1. Make an effort to behold the wondrous beauty of the other person, in character and works
 - 2. AND make an effort to behold the wondrous weaknesses of yourself IN THAT VERY RELATIONSHIP
 - ii. See if it does not lead to gratitude – it can lead nowhere else.
 - 1. This is the incarnate mind – the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:3-11)
3. We Give Thanks TO GOD for Doing These Wonders
- a. It is easy to be grateful for the gifts, but fall in love with the gifts rather than the Giver
 - i. We see the greatness of our redemption, but miss the greatness of the God who chooses to do it
 - ii. We see and glory in the greatness of Creation, but miss the even greater greatness of the God of gods and Lord over lords
 - iii. We must take the wonder which we see at His gifts and look up from them to see the wonder in the face of the ONE WHO DOES THEM
 - b. Give thanks TO THE ONE WHO does these wondrous things!
 - i. “Give thanks” is always followed by a list of descriptive nouns, all referring to the LORD
 - 1. “...to the God of gods” (v2)
 - 2. “...to the Lord of lords” (v3)
 - 3. “...to the one who made...” (v5)
 - ii. Wonder only finds its completion in the return of praise to the one who has done great things
 - 1. Until we find the Giver and look the Giver in the eyes and praise Him, these urges of gratitude are incomplete
 - 2. Each wonder of God’s great love is meant to incite us to exultation
 - iii. G.K. Chesterton: “A man varies his movements because of some slight element of failure or fatigue. He gets into an omnibus because he is tired of walking; or he walks because he is tired of sitting still. But if his life and joy were so gigantic that he never tired of going to Islington, he might go to Islington as regularly as the Thames goes to Sheerness ... It might be true that the sun rises regularly because he never gets tired of rising. His routine might be due, not to a lifelessness, but to a rush of life. The thing I mean can be seen, for instance, in children, when they find some game or joke that they specially enjoy. A child kicks his legs rhythmically through excess, not absence, of life. Because children have abounding vitality, because they are in spirit fierce and free, therefore they want things repeated and unchanged. They always say,

‘Do it again’; and the grown-up person does it again until he is nearly dead. For grown-up people are not strong enough to exult in monotony. But perhaps God is strong enough to exult in monotony. It is possible that God says every morning, ‘Do it again’ to the sun; and every evening, ‘Do it again’ to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. It may be that He has the eternal appetite of infancy; for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father is younger than we. The repetition in Nature may not be a mere recurrence; it may be a theatrical encore.” (Orthodoxy, *The Ethics of Elfland*, p41)

- c. Christmas begs us to wonder at the greatness of God – the unfathomable mystery that the Uncreated One who does wondrous and cataclysmic things would not merely be wrapped in humanity, but *become* human.
 - i. Wonder of wonders and mystery of mysteries
 - ii. No other work of God is as majestic or wondrous or cataclysmic as this!
 1. God created the cosmos? That’s amazing!
 - a. God *became* human? That’s more amazing!
 2. God causes the sun to rise daily and provides every animal its food in the morning? That’s wonderful!
 - a. God *became* human? That’s more wonderful!
 3. Those who deny that Jesus worked miracles or rose from the dead, must first deny the Incarnation, because if it be true, then all the other wonders of God become possibilities, for they are lesser wonders
 - iii. Shall, then, we behold this great rescue as *wondrous*? As the *miracle* for which it truly is?
 1. I think that Christmas becomes so tick-tock true-to-time that we lose the sense of its majesty that we had as leg-kicking children. The mystery and awe of the lights and trees, the gifts and gladness, the smells in the kitchen and the treats on the table.
 2. The very truth that God became Human in a Divine Rescue Mission, the weightiness of His self-giving, the glory of it all, becomes to our hearts *normalized*, and we lose our sense of wonder.
 - a. It’s as if His utter faithfulness, mercies new every morning like the sunrise, that we stop looking at the miracle of such a glorious wonder...
 - b. Stop and look at your Divine Rescuer and His rescue of you from the abusive enemy who enslaved you, confused you, deceived you, and led you to ruin...
 - d. And ask ourselves WHY God has done these wondrous things?
4. The One Who Works Such Wonders Does it Because of His Love
 - a. God has worked these wonders *because He loves* – He loves us to make us wonder at His love!
 - i. That is amazing!!
 - ii. There are four particular covenants from the OT alluded to in this passage
 1. Adam – Creation story
 2. Noah – “All flesh” mercy of God
 3. Moses – Exodus redemption of Israel
 4. Abrahamic – Inheritance of land promised to Abraham’s descendants, those of faith
 - iii. Each repetition of God’s enduring and merciful love is preceded by the word “because” (and it is repeated 26 times!)
 - b. God’s covenant love is undefeatable
 - i. Literally, “into eternity is His covenant love (*chesed*)”
 - ii. Every covenant by which man had an obligation, he failed
 1. Adam sinned
 2. Mosaic Law slayed us and revealed our sin
 - iii. But God has kept His promises anyway
 1. The Noahitic covenant was a one-sided promise of God not to flood the earth again
 2. The Abrahamic covenant was also a one-sided promise of God to bless those who entrust themselves to him
 3. THAT is WONDROUS!!
 - c. God’s covenant love is ultimately revealed in the NEW COVENANT: JESUS

- i. He is the Serpent-Crushing Curse-Breaker promised to Adam and Eve
- ii. He is the Law-Keeping Righteousness of God and the Sacrificial Lamb who atones for our sins promised to Moses
- iii. He is the One who cut the way through the waters of Death and vanquished all our enemies to lead us to a place of adoption and belonging in the presence of God as our Father
- iv. He is the Love of God personified in wondrous mystery
- d. The Psalmist says that God is the God over gods, but God is not only sovereign over all, He is also good.
 - i. The incarnation of the Son of God shows us His great love, His enduring faithfulness to bless the sons of men
 - ii. He has entered into the very suffering which He has executed in His holy judgment, to become our Redeemer from the inside.
 - 1. So, He cannot be called callous or harsh or distant.
 - iii. This duality of God's sovereignty over our suffering and His sharing in our suffering is essential to the assertion that His love is for all eternity. Consider:
 - 1. If God is out of control of history, then suffering is not part of any plan; it is random and senseless. This would be the secular view.
 - 2. On the other hand, if God Himself has not suffered, then how can we trust Him when His hands bring exile or wilderness wanderings upon us?
- e. Dorothy Sayers writes it eloquently:

“For whatever reason, God chose to make man as he is—limited and suffering and subject to sorrows and death—he [God] had the honesty and the courage to take his own medicine. Whatever game he is playing with his creation, he has kept his own rules and played fair. He can exact nothing from man that he has not exacted from himself. He has himself gone through the whole of human experience, from the trivial irritations of family life and the cramping restrictions of hard work and lack of money to the worst horrors of pain and humiliation, defeat, despair, and death. When he was a man, he played the man. He was born in poverty and died in disgrace, and thought it was worthwhile.” - *The Greatest Drama Ever Staged*

Here's the rub. Because God loves sinners, then that means that God suffers. And He, the wonder-worker, the meaning-maker, the cosmos-causer, *chose to suffer* because *His love is truly that great*. *How can I not give thanks?*

Here's the truth. When you look at Creation and wonder – when you feel the crushing fearsome beauty of the ferocity of a windstorm and the terrifying power of its grandeur as the waves crash gloriously upon the rocks, threatening you with their dragnet to the deep – and when you look at the wondrous kindnesses of God – when you see the provision of the little things and stop taking them for granted; the warmth of the morning sun upon your closed eyelids, rendering them bright pinkish orange upon your eyes, the crunch of the outer crumb of a freshly baked loaf of bread, crumbling to tasty little bits upon your fingers, and you WONDER at them, you take the first step towards knowing God's love.

And the second step is necessary to truly know God and thus to truly know what it means to live. When you see that you have belittled the One who made it, you have spurned Him and His glory, you have tried to cast Him aside as One who chains you up and holds you down, that you have looked upon the Son whom He sent and were so offended by His exclusive claims and righteous words of judgment that you took that Son, that perfect Natural Man, the human who was the way humans are supposed to be, you took Love personified...and nailed him naked to a wooden beam in your own judgment. You don't deserve God's kindness. We don't deserve God's love...but it endures forever.

When you see this double-truth: Wonder upon wonder that God is so gloriously powerful and kind and I am so utterly undeserving of any of it...then the reality that God sent His Son to suffer and to die my deserved death so that I might be rescued from my own pit of despair...when I look upon the cross of THAT God...into the face of THAT God...what else can I do than give thanks, proclaim my gratitude, extol Him in my wonder. What wondrous love is this, O my soul?

Therefore, cultivate gratitude by meditating on the Incarnation of the Son of God – and wonder in the light of your humble estate that God, the Almighty Uncreated Speaker of Worlds, Himself became humiliated, as a servant...to redeem you from your tired, sinful, fatigued and condemned souls...because He loves you.