

## **“The True Essence of Thanksgiving”**

### **I Chronicles 29:10-16**

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor  
Smoke Rise Baptist Church  
Stone Mountain, Georgia  
November 21, 2004

I don't want you to miss it and it could easily be done. With all the cleaning, cooking, eating, playing and napping that will take place Thanksgiving Day, the meaning and purpose of this holiday could easily be missed.

So, what is the purpose of Thanksgiving Day? It is a time to express and show love and appreciation to God and others. Be sure not to miss the second part of that statement. Thanksgiving is not merely a time to express gratitude but show it. One without the other is incomplete. Today's text will reveal what I mean.

I Chronicles 29:10-16 is considered one of the most beautiful prayers in scripture. It is a combination of fine poetry and sound theology. A mature believer that clearly understood the relationship between God and man wrote it and that man was David, the second king of Israel.

Many consider this David's farewell prayer. He was nearing the end of his life and going out on a high note. He challenged his people to contribute generously to a fund to build the temple in Jerusalem and they accepted his challenge. They gave sacrificially and abundantly.

After seeing their many gifts, David offered this prayer of thanksgiving and praise on behalf of Israel. I am not surprised. The Hebrew people believed that the greatest prayers were those that expressed gratitude to God for His goodness and faithfulness. This prayer is a good example. Let's study it as we prepare to celebrate Thanksgiving later this week.

For me, the focus of the prayer is found in verse thirteen, **“Now, our God, we give you thanks and praise your glorious name.”** For what was David thankful? After reading the text numerous times, I came to this conclusion. He was grateful for who God was and had to express it. He was overwhelmed with a sense of God's greatness, goodness and generosity.

*David praised the Lord in the presence of the whole assembly saying, ‘Praise be to you, O Lord, God of our Father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O Lord, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler over all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. Now, our God, we give you thanks and praise your glorious name. ’*

*‘But who am I and who are my people that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you and we have given you only what comes from your hand. We are aliens and strangers in your sight as were all our forefathers. Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope. O Lord, our God, as for all this abundance that we have provided for building you a temple for your Holy Name, it comes from your hand and all of it belongs to you’ I Chronicles 29:10-16.*

Surely you can sense it. **David was awed by the fact that the everlasting God of creation would be so kind and generous to him and his people.** After all, they were

merely aliens and strangers passing through this world for such a brief time and yet God was aware of their journey and participating in it with them.

The “ruler of all things” was willing to use His strength and power to empower and exalt them. The owner of all things was eager to share His resources to take care of them. David was overwhelmed to say the least.

**What was his response?** He did two things. He offered God his praise and his offerings. “David praised the Lord in the presence of the whole assembly.” Openly and proudly, David acknowledged God’s greatness and goodness. Unashamedly, he publicly worshipped.

Perhaps George Washington shared David’s beliefs when he wrote our country’s first Presidential Proclamation on October 3, 1789. “Whereas it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits and humbly implore His protection, aid and favor... I do recommend and assign Thursday, the 26<sup>th</sup> day of November next, to be devoted by the People of these states to the service of the great and glorious Being who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is or that will be. That we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection of the People of this Country previous to their becoming a Nation ... and for the great degree of tranquility, union and plenty which we have since enjoyed.”

Under the weight of the Civil War, President Lincoln wrote two presidential proclamations in 1863. The first was a call for prayer and fasting on March 30, 1863. “We have been recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven. We have grown in numbers, wealth and power as no other nation has ever grown, but we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace and multiplied, enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us. It behooves us then to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins and to pray for clemency and forgiveness.”

The second proclamation was written five months later and was the first thanksgiving proclamation written in forty-five years by a president. “The year that is drawing to its close has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added, which are of such extraordinary a nature that they cannot fail to penetrate and soften even the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever watchful providence of Almighty God. No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins hath nevertheless remembered mercy. It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently and gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and one voice by the whole American People.”

I believe David felt this same sense of gratitude for God’s blessings upon him and his people and was eager to proclaim it. His public words of appreciation, as those of past presidents, were important.

Something else was important to David, too. Words were not enough. He felt the desire to sacrificially give the resources entrusted to his care to the building of the first temple and boldly he encouraged his people to follow suit. "We have given you only what comes from your hand," David said. "As for all this abundance that we have provided for building you a temple for your Holy Name, it comes from your hand and all of it belongs to you."

I think David captured the true essence of Thanksgiving. It is a time to express appreciation in word and deed. One without the other is insufficient. Generosity must inspire generosity or the receiver will become possessive, selfish, demanding and ungrateful.

May I again cite George Washington who realized that the blessed must become a blessing. In his final Thanksgiving address written in 1795, he prayed that God would "impart all the blessing we possess or ask for ourselves to the whole family of mankind."

In 1901, Teddy Roosevelt followed up this idea with his own words, "Let us remember that, as much has been given us, much will be expected from us, and that true homage comes from the heart as well as from the lips and shows itself in deeds."

**With these thoughts in mind, my challenge to you this week is this.** Count your blessings from God and look for ways to share them. Do something that lets every family member and friend around your Thanksgiving table know how much you love God and them. Don't hold back. Follow David's lead and past Presidents' advice. Then be prepared to have the best Thanksgiving you have had in years because you have captured the true significance and purpose of this historic day.