

Offer to God a Sacrifice of Thanksgiving  
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By all accounts, or most accounts at least, we are in days of economic trouble. These are, possibly historically, troubling days economically; type of thing where past weeks it's gone from talking about recession to possibility of depression complete with memories of black and white photos of soup lines and bankruptcies, things like that from the 1930s. We are in days that are days of trouble economically.

Question—how do we, as Christians, approach those days? How do we enter into them? And I'm not talking here about specific strategies of investment and saving, and cooperation and all that sort of stuff. How do we enter into it in terms of a basic pattern, a basic rhythm, a basic drumbeat that can set a cadence to all the varied situations that come up in days like these? Is there a basic Christian way to approach days of trouble? In this case economic, but in any other case is there a basic Christian way to approach days of trouble? The answer—absolutely; absolutely.

God, Himself, put it this way. He says

*“Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me”*

We can state it simply. It's something to be lived deliberately, diligently, carefully. It's a rhythm of life that God has designed and made available to us. We face days of trouble, we call upon Him, He responds in His grace and His mercy, and we honor Him. That's the basic pattern.

Unfortunately, in the press of the problematic, when things seem to overwhelm us with the complexity and the enormity of the situations we face in our day...I mean, they're talking economic issues that go around the globe as well as impact locally...in the press of the problematic oftentimes we look at an ancient verse of scripture like this and we push it aside. We don't give it place in our lives. We don't let it be the drumbeat that sets the cadence as we enter every day. That's problematic because if we don't give place to this verse, this scripture, this word from God in our lives, we don't give place to God in the middle of these days.

And so my target today, my goal today, is we will give place in our congregation to this verse...with the goal that as we do so we will be giving place to God as we move on into the days ahead. So I ask you to turn with me to Psalm 50. And we're gonna read it through. It's a little long for reading, but we're gonna do that. It's one of the things that the scripture encourages us to do, is to read scripture. And I'm gonna read through the entire passage here. It's about twenty-three verses, but it won't take us long as we do it.

As we get ready to read it there's probably only two historical notes, background notes, that I'll give you that'll help as we read. Number one is that it's good to remember that the nation of Israel, at this time—this was written well before the time of Christ—the nation of Israel had a special relationship with God built around a covenant, a covenant that was established in the wilderness at Mt. Sinai when God gave the nation of Israel the Ten Great Commandments, the six-hundred-and-some other commandments that came with them, and He said 'I will be your God, and you will be My people, if you are willing to accept this treaty, this covenant,' this testament we call it. And the nation of Israel, there in the wilderness of Sinai as God gave them that commands and gave 'em the instructions, they said, 'Yes, we will do that. We will be Your people, we will keep Your law.' And we had birthed out there in the Sinai wilderness, under Moses, the first and only pure theocracy in human history. That's in the background of this text. There's a people that have a special relationship with God—Israel, based on a covenant, a treaty they made with Him out in the Sinai wilderness.

The second thing is the sacrificial system was central to that covenant, very much a part of that relationship with God in the Old Testament. Animals were continually sacrificed. It was a system God put in place for the Israelites that gave them a way to seek forgiveness; it gave them a way to express commitment and dedication, and it also gave 'em a way to show gratitude. That sacrificial system brought animals, brought to the temple and offered in sacrifice, as a way to seek forgiveness, to express commitment, and lastly to show gratitude.

Now, we live in a different covenant in the New Testament, a better covenant we're told. And it is better. We no longer have that sacrificial system because the great sacrifice has already been offered for us. And instead of using sacrifices to seek forgiveness, we just believe in Jesus, who made the ultimate sacrifice. And instead of giving sacrifices to express our commitment, we simply follow Jesus, who gave the ultimate sacrifice of dedication. And instead of offering animals to express our gratitude toward God, we simply express thanks to Jesus and the sacrifice He's given.

So it's a different covenant. But there's things that relate, even as we go back and read this passage. So let's read through, beginning at verse 1 of Psalm 50. It starts like this. It says

*The Mighty One, God, the LORD, has spoken,  
And summoned the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting.  
And out of Zion, the city of Jerusalem, the perfection of beauty,  
God has shown forth.*

And then the people call out

*May our God come and not keep silence,  
Fire devours before Him,  
And it is very tempestuous around Him.  
He summons the heavens above,  
And the earth, to judge His people:  
"Gather My godly ones to Me,  
Those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice."  
And the heavens declare His righteousness,  
For God Himself is judge.*

*Selah [or pause]*

Then the word of God continues. He says to His people

*"Hear, O My people, and I will speak;  
O Israel, I will testify against you;  
I am God, your God.  
I do not reprove you for your sacrifices,  
And your burnt offerings are continually before Me.  
I shall take no young bull out of your house,  
Nor male goats out of your folds.  
For every beast of the field is Mine,  
The cattle on a thousand hills.  
I know every bird in the mountains,  
And everything that moves in the field is Mine."*

I have this vision of this little mouse squirreling across...

*"If I were hungry, I would not tell you;  
For the world is Mine, and all it contains.  
And even shall I eat the flesh of bulls,  
Or drink the blood of male goats?"*

God doesn't eat that!

*"Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving,  
And pay your vows to the Most High;  
Call upon Me in the day of trouble;  
I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me."*

Doesn't finish there. He has another group within His people that He wants to address, so He goes on; in verse 16 he says

*But to the wicked God says,  
“What right have you to tell Me of My statutes,  
And to take My covenant in your mouth?  
For you hate discipline,  
And you cast My words behind you.  
When you see a thief, you are pleased with him,  
And you associate with adulterers.  
You let your mouth loose in evil,  
And your tongue frames deceit.  
You sit and speak against your brother;  
You slander your own mother’s son.  
These things you have done, and I kept silence;  
You thought I was just like you;  
I will reprove you, and state the case in order before your eyes.”*

*“Now consider this, you who forget God,  
Or I’ll tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.  
He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honors Me;  
And to him who orders his way aright  
I shall show the way of salvation.”*

Read an ancient text like this and you kinda wonder why do we pay attention to this talk of angels...I mean, of sacrifices, and God sayin’ to people, ‘I’ll tear you to pieces.’ There’s a reason we pay attention to this. Jesus pointed to the Psalms as a source of truth with respect to God.

Picture a bookstore with all the books related to God and spiritual life laid out in front of you. And you walk in there and you’re confused, and you’re not sure which book to take. Which book can you read that’ll be accurate about God and who He is. And picture Jesus right there beside you, and He walks over and He picks up a little...little volume called “The Psalms: 150 Little Poems and Prayers.” And He takes that off the shelf and He gives it to you, and He says, ‘There. If you want to know what God is like, read this.’

That’s why we pay attention to the Psalms. And this particular psalm, the fiftieth Psalm, gives us a vision of God as judge, one that we tend to be a little uncomfortable with. Other Psalms speak of God as the Great Shepherd; they speak of Him as our rock, our refuge, our deliverer, the warrior, the great king. But this one focuses on God as judge. And that picture has two key elements to it. When we speak of God as judge we’re speaking of Him as the one who determines if standards have been met. He’s the one who determines if we are, in fact, meeting the standards He has set. As judge, He makes that determination. We don’t, He does. Secondly, He is the one who determines the consequences if those standards are not met. In other words, God’s the one who renders the verdict—guilty or innocent. And beyond that, He is also the one, having rendered the verdict, pronounces the sentence, what the consequences will be.

And that’s what’s going on in this psalm. We have a vision of God the Judge, the Ultimate Judge, the Mighty Judge, the One before whom all earth and of heaven stops to hear His verdict. The unusual thing in this particular psalm, or the thing that kind of catches us off-guard and unexpectedly, is God the Judge is confronting His people...this special people that had made the agreement with Him, that He called My people, that He gave a special relationship to...they’re the ones He confronts in this psalm. He comes to them, He says He summons them for His heaven, He summons the heavens above, and the earth; in other words, He grabs...He summons all the universe around Him because He’s ready to judge His people. It’s a little bit unexpected. In fact, in the opening verses as God is pictured as judge, His people are saying, ‘Come, come and judge!’ And we know that the tendency is to think ‘Judge all the wicked people around us.’ But the important principal, remember, with our God, is accountability always begins with His own people. Old Testament, New...principal remains—God’s judgment always begins with His own people. And that’s what’s happening in this psalm. It’s His own people that He’s calling to account.

First thing He does as He confronts His people is He reproves the careless. There’s a sting of rebuke, and He speaks to those who are careless. And He focuses on the careless within His people by saying, first of all, the problem is not with their sacrifices. Verse 5...I mean, excuse me, verse 8...He says, ‘I don’t reprove you, I don’t rebuke you because of your sacrifices, because of the offerings you’ve been bringing.’ He says, “Your burnt offerings are before Me continually.” He says, ‘I am not rebuking you because of the offerings you’re bringing.

And the problem, as He goes on from there, is very clear. It's not rebuke because He needs more offerings—He doesn't! The problem behind this rebuke, the problem from this reproof, is the offering that is *not* being brought. There's no problems with the offerings being brought; there's an offering, however, that's *not* being brought. And He gets to that when He comes to verse 14. They've been careless about this one. He says

*"Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving."*

These were a special offering in Israel's history. They would experience God's grace, and the idea was that you would then go to the temple and you would bring a sacrificial animal. And it would be sacrificed. And then you would share that animal, that meal, with your friends there in the temple. You would celebrate a fellowship meal. And as you ate that meal you would tell the story of how God had blessed you. It was a special kind of sacrifice. And God says, 'Offer those! You offer all kinds of other offerings; offer these!'

See, they had become careless. The typical pattern was you would be in times of trouble, a day of desperation, and you would say "God, help me! And if You do, I'll offer You...I'll go to the temple and I'll offer You a thanksgiving sacrifice." They hadn't been...they hadn't been keepin' that vow. They'd gotten careless with it. And God said, 'Hey, keep this vow! You're seeking forgiveness with sacrifices. That's great. You're expressing commitment in your sacrifices. That's great. I'm not rebuking you for that. The problem is you're not saying 'Thank You' with your sacrifices, and you need to do that.'

And then He gives the verse that is the centerpiece of today for us, and that's that verse we started off with, simple three-part verse: "*Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me.*" God says that's the way it is. That's the basic pattern. But it's a pattern you can't approach carelessly. It's a pattern you can't follow casually. It's a basic life pattern that requires diligence and deliberate care repeatedly. In days of trouble you go back to the source of all good, you call upon God, He answers you, and then you honor Him. That's the pattern to follow. And it's a pattern of diligence that's deliberate, persistent, and repeated. These people had become careless and casual.

We say, 'Oh, that's not that big a thing, is it?' God, who determines if standards have been met, says it's a very big thing. It's a very big thing.

It doesn't stop with the careless. He goes on and He will warn the wicked. This is interesting, because He's still speaking to His people. He's still speaking to those who would say, "Yeah, we follow God." He's still speakin' to the people who would read scripture, who would recite the terms of the Covenant. They could recite the Ten Commandments. But He calls them wicked. He addresses 'em and He says

*But to the wicked God says,*

...and He goes on to speak of them, and to describe them. And there's a description here that gives you a picture of how God views the wicked. What is a wicked person really like? We use that term a lot. What is a wicked person really like? What are the distinctive marks? And there's a number of things in here, but two are foundational. He highlights two basic things. He says, He starts off, He says, 'Listen, you don't have a right at all to put My words on your mouth. You don't have any right to say you are part of the Covenant. And here's why.' He says it's because "*You hate discipline.*" 'You absolutely detest it when I try to lead you, direct you, or correct you. You hate discipline.' And number two, "*You cast My words behind you.*" 'You take what I say and throw it away.'

Now He goes on and He describes some of the moral issues that related to that, and flow out from that; but the key, the foundation, is 'You hate discipline. You do not want Me directing your life. And you take what I say and put it behind you, to go your way.' *That* is wickedness. That is wickedness.

He, to the wicked, will eventually say to them, 'You who forget God, you who throw off His discipline, who take His words and put it behind you,' He says two things. Number one, He says, 'Consider this, or I'll tear you in pieces. Pay close attention, listen to what I'm gonna say next, or I'm gonna tear you in pieces,' He says. 'And there's gonna be no one to deliver you.' And then this is what He says.

*"He who offers a sacrifice of Thanksgiving honors Me."*

'You say 'Thank You' to Me and you honor Me.' And beyond that, He goes on and says

*"And to him who orders his way aright..."*

...who deliberately and diligently follows the pattern we're talking about—days of trouble, call out, God delivers, and we give honor—He says to that person who deliberately, diligently, repeatedly follows that pattern,

*"I will show the salvation of God."*

That's the surrounding context for our verse. You can hear it at least three ways in that context. You read that and, sitting here today, you should hear it one of three ways. Some of you hearing that verse today in this context should feel a sting of rebuke. If you're to look at your life over the past months, the past year, maybe the past weeks, you would find you've been careless...that you have been diligent to seek God's forgiveness, you've been diligent to express your commitment, and maybe do great things for God. But truth be told, you haven't shown gratitude. You haven't said, "God, thank You." You haven't spoken well of Him to other people. You haven't acknowledged the good that He's done in your life. You haven't said thank You. And as a result, you have not honored Him. See, I'm convinced nothing honors God more than His people saying, "Thank You." Some of you need to feel it as a sharp rebuke.

Some of you need to hear it as a stern warning. You come and go among God's people; you read scripture when it's read; but you leave His word behind you. It's not what's shaping your life. It's not setting the cadence, or the rhythm, or the beat to how you enter each day. You need a stern warning. You're wicked; you're wicked. If you don't give place to God's word, then you don't give place to God and you forget Him. And that makes you a wicked person. I wish I could find a different term for it, a term that was more comfortable, a term that was more relaxing. But the One who...the One who determines if standards are met says that if we do not hold to His word the standard's not met. We're wicked.

For all of us, whether we hear it as a sharp reproof or a stern warning...or maybe it's an affirmation. It's been something you've been working on. Maybe this has been a life verse, and you've been trying to follow this verse all of your life, and this is just affirmation for you today. However you hear it, we should all hear it as a great encouragement.

You say, 'Wait a minute, Larry. You've been so stern about this; how you can say it's encouraging...'

It is. Number one, number one—this is God speaking a warning. It is not God pronouncing a sentence. It is God giving people opportunity to change direction before there's consequence. It's a beautiful psalm that way—this God giving a warning before there are consequences, an opportunity to change direction, an opportunity to begin to take His word seriously, an opportunity to live it carefully, the opportunity to begin to say "Thank You." That's an encouragement, that our God would approach it this way...a warning rather than a sentence.

And secondly is when I read this verse I see the promise...a promise to live out in the days ahead; a promise that no matter what that day of trouble is, simply call on Him, He will rescue, and we will honor Him; we'll give thanks. That's a pattern open to all of us. It's a pattern we can enter into, and it's a pattern no matter how things sound as we look at the weeks ahead and the months ahead economically, and the years ahead, we can enter 'em with that perspective.

I like to put it this way in my mind. We can move into whatever lies ahead, whatever troubling days lie ahead, by honoring God simply by moving from one 'Thank You' to another. We meet one day of trouble and we call out; He rescues, we give thanks, and we move on to the next. What a way of life! And it's open to us through Jesus. And so I want to invite you to it. And I wanna encourage you to enter into it. Start this week if you haven't. Make this a week in which you will say "Thank You" to God. And make it also a week in which you will move on to other "Thank You"s by calling out in the day of trouble.

*Our Father in heaven,*

*Our desire is to honor You. We do that, Father, with commitment to Your work in simple things like this, giving so needs of others will be met. Father, we also do it by giving thanks. And so, Father, even as we act in commitment and dedication with this offering, we sing with thanks. And we honor You as the One who has been there for us over and over, time and time again.*

*In Jesus' name, amen.*