

## **+ Give Thanks for God's Gifts of Life (Lesson Introductions) + Thanksgiving Eve + 27 November 2013 +**

### **Give Thanks for God's Gift of Physical Life – Psalm 139:1-18**

When you woke up this morning, did you give thanks? If you did, did you give thanks for waking up this morning? Each and every day, our gracious Lord opens his hand and pours out on each of us more blessings than we could possibly count or even realize. At Thanksgiving, we pause ever so briefly to give thanks for those countless gifts, but amidst all that giving thanks for food and family and friends and toys and Jesus and so much more, we sometimes tend to forget about gifts we enjoy every single day. They've become so common to us that in a certain sense we take them for granted. One of those gifts is life—physical life.

Every one of us here is enjoying that gift of physical life right now as we breathe in and breathe out, as our hearts pump blood throughout our bodies. This is a gift each of us has been enjoying since the moment our lives began at conception, yet like all other things, physical life is a gift from God. From the hairs on our heads to the bottom of our feet, every part is a gift from the hand of our gracious Creator. He formed us in our mother's wombs, caused us to grow, and continues to give us each and every day during the time of grace he gives to each and every one of us. So when you wake up or when you go to bed, when you breathe in or breathe out, when you hold an infant in your arms or see your children or grandchildren grow or even mourn the end of life of a loved one, give thanks for God's gift of physical life!

*Hear now a reading from Psalm 139.*

### **Give Thanks for God's Gift of Preserving Life – Matthew 6:25-34**

We like to worry, don't we? You look at rising prices and piling bills and worry about how you're going to pay for them. You don't feel so good and really should go to a doctor, so you worry about what he's going to find. You watch your kids or grandkids grow and you worry about what's going to happen in their lives. You worry about today. You worry about tomorrow. You worry about big things. You worry about little things. So do I.

Yet what does Jesus say? *"Don't worry about your life..."*, and our first reaction is, "How am I going to do that when I don't know what's in the future or what plans you have for me or my loved ones? How do I know you're going to take care of me?" Stop for a moment and look at your life. Has not the Lord provided clothing and shoes, food and drink, a home, a family, a job, plenty of stuff, including everything you need to keep your body and life? Has he not defended you against danger and guarded you from evil? Has he not provided good weather and health and good friends and a good name? Has he not given you all these things in the past? If he's done that and we'll hear about more, then certainly you have no need to worry. Instead when the Lord provides with abundance or with little, be sure to give thanks for God's gift of preserving life!

*Hear now a reading from Matthew 6.*

### **Give Thanks for God's Gift of Spiritual Life – Ephesians 2:1-10**

I had nothing to do with it. I was dead—in transgressions and sins. I had willingly crossed the line with the holy God and chose to go with those who rebelled against his holy Name. I gladly refused to obey his holy will and allowed my foolish sinful nature to blindly drag me here and there to the next temptation. I made myself an object of God's holy wrath and deserved his condemnation. I was dead. I was blind. I was hostile.

...But that same God, who is also rich in mercy and overflowing with great love, made me alive with Christ. He raised me to new life. He opened my eyes to see what he had done for me in the life, death, and resurrection of my Savior Jesus. He cleansed me of all my sins with his blood and the waters of Holy Baptism and made me his own child. It is by grace I have been saved!

You could say the same thing about yourself too. You were dead. You were blind. You were hostile, but you were saved by God's grace in Christ Jesus. *"Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved."* Especially if you've been a lifelong Christian, this particular gift is one that we sometimes take for granted, but it's the greatest gift of all because it changes the rest of our lives here on earth and forever in heaven. Even if we forget to give thanks for God's gifts of physical and preserving life, let us never forget to give thanks for God's gift of spiritual life!

*Hear now a reading from Ephesians 2.*

### **Give Thanks for God's Gift of Resurrected Life – 1 Corinthians 15:51-57**

Typically at Thanksgiving we give thanks for gifts we're enjoying right now. Sometimes we might give thanks for gifts we had in the past, especially in the past year, but rarely do we give thanks for gifts God will give us in the future. That's largely due to the fact that we don't know what gifts God will give us in the future.

Yet as we consider God's gifts of life, there are a couple gifts coming to us in the future that even now on Thanksgiving 2013 cause us to give thanks. The first of those gifts is the resurrected life. Our physical lives come to an end when our Lord determines when our time of grace comes to an end. However, because our gracious God has given us spiritual life through our Savior Jesus Christ, we can be sure that one day we will actually be raised to life. Our Savior Jesus conquered death and by doing so, he guaranteed our resurrection from the dead. The perishable will become imperishable and the mortal will be clothed with immortality, because the grave will not be able to hold our glorified bodies any longer.

Yes, that's a gift we don't get to enjoy right now, but that future gift gives us real hope right now. Knowing that God will raise us from the dead on the Last Day dries our tears when we grieve, calms our hearts when we fear, and strengthens us when we are weak. So let's give thanks for God's gift of resurrected life!

*Hear now a reading from 1 Corinthians 15.*

### **Give Thanks for God's Gift of Eternal Life – Revelation 21:1-7, 22:1-6**

Our gracious and almighty Lord has one more future gift of life that gives us reason to give thanks—the gift of eternal life. Our lives in this world are marred by the consequences and effects of sin. On the timeline of eternity, even the longest human life is just a blip, but because we have been given the gift of a Savior, our lives here don't end with physical death. No, an eternity of rest and comfort and joy and peace and life awaits us in the glories of heaven, but there's something even greater about God's gift of eternal life.

We will be with Jesus. We will see his face. We will have no need for sadness or fear or guilt or worry, because he will be with us. He will be our light. He will be our life for all eternity. That's a gift you and I possess even now through faith in Christ Jesus, but one we will enjoy in full in the Lord's own gracious time. This Thanksgiving and every day of our lives, give thanks for God's gift of eternal life and all his gifts of life! Amen.

*Hear now a reading from Revelation 21 and 22.*