

Text: Psalm 107: 17-22 Thanksgiving Eve. Give thanks for his unfailing love!

Give thanks to the Lord for he is good; his love endures forever.

There's a song written a while back by Randy Travis. It's actually the song my wife and I had our first dance to at our wedding. The refrain goes like this, "I'm gonna love you forever, forever and ever Amen. As long as old men sit and talk about the weather, as long as old women sit and talk about old men. If you wonder how long I'll be faithful, I'll be happy to tell you again. I'm gonna love you forever, forever and ever Amen."

It's a nice sentiment, and it really is about the best a man or woman can do. That's about the best guarantee that we as imperfect people can come up with. Imagine how silly it would sound if that was actually the wedding vow, "As surely as old men talk about the weather or old women talk about old men, so I will love you!" We know well how often our forever and ever guarantee is not held up, especially in marriage. But Our God has a different love for us, and it's not based on talking about the weather. Our God's love for us will endure forever, and that is a guarantee from a God who not only loves, but is love! That love is something to treasure above all else; it's the thing to be most thankful for on this day of thanksgiving. **Give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love**, and his wonderful deeds for mankind.

Maybe you've heard that question, "How can God be a God of love with all the stuff that is messed up in this world?" The problem isn't with God's love, it's with us. Let's take a moment to consider God's unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind. God creates the first people, Adam and Eve completely holy, perfect and without sin. When they sin by disobeying the one command God had set down for them, God shows love by making the first promise to send the Savior.

In the following generations, mankind's wickedness grew so great that every inclination of man's heart was only evil all the time. But God showed love to a believing man named Noah and his family by saving them from the floodwaters and by continuing to preserve the promise of the Savior. Many generations later, God brought his people out of Egypt with the with the most miraculous wonders, the 10 plagues and the parting of the Red Sea. No sooner than he had done so, the people were making a golden calf and grumbling that they had no food. Yet God had mercy on them, forgave them, he loved them and brought his people to the promised land.

God's people had finally been given the land long promised to their ancestors by God, and yet they turned to false gods and intermingled with heathen nations and eventually were taken into captivity because of their sin. But God showed love by bringing them back to the city of Jerusalem and preserving a remnant, a small portion who would carry on the line of the Savior. We see the cycle of the people's sin and God's unfailing love over and over. As the Psalm says, "They became fools through their rebellious ways and suffered affliction because of their iniquities.

Maybe as you've heard the cycle, you've been tempted to think, "Ugh, the Old Testament people were so terrible. All they did was sin!" But consider that cycle in your own life. How do you become fools through your rebellious ways? What are the things that your conscience knows are wrong, and you go ahead and do them anyway? Is it the dirty words that sound so funny and

cool when my friends say them, or when they're on my favorite show. Then, slowly they start coming out of our mouths more and more and we think less and less about them.

Does it start with putting yourself in the situation where you know your rebellious heart can run wild? Being alone with the computer, or with Netflix, and the next thing you know what's on that screen is something unfit for anyone to see. The conscience cries "No!" But the rebellious heart says, "Just this once!" and after that, "Just a little more."

Then comes the guilt, the soul-afflicting guilt so bad your stomach turns. The Psalm says, "they loathed all food." They couldn't eat, or even look at food, and it felt as though they were standing next to the gates of death, down in the depths and wallowing in sin. "Can God really love me after what I've done."

It's an ugly cycle and the only thing that can break it is the Lord's unfailing love. "Then they cried to the Lord in their distress and he saved them." When you cry to the Lord in your distress, he saves you! Whatever your distress may be, whatever the guilt, the Lord longs to show his unfailing love to those who call upon him with broken hearts. He longs to save you from your distress and bring you back to him. He longs to be faithful to the promise of the Savior he made to Adam and preserved with his miraculous deeds.

The word in the Psalm for "he saves them" is the root word for the name Jesus. Remember what the angel said to Mary before the birth of Jesus? "You are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins. He will save you from your sins, even the ones you think are too bad. The Psalmist says, "He sent forth his word and healed him." Jesus, the Word, became flesh and was born on this earth to live the perfect life we have failed over and over to live. God sent forth his Son to exchange our sinful lives for his perfect life and so that he could heal us with his blood. God continues to send forth his word connected with the waters of Baptism and the body and blood in the Lord's Supper, to assure us that every one of our sins has been wiped clean.

This unfailing love covers over our rebellious way and breaks the cycle of sin. It rescues us from the same pitfalls of our foolish heart. It lifts the burden of guilt that had us standing at the gates of death, and this unfailing love calls us to the arms of our heavenly Father. Our God rescues us from grave, from the power of death, and from hell itself. There is no more miraculous deed that the Lord has performed, than the Son of God dying on the cross for the sins of the world and rising from the dead. You want proof of God's unfailing love in this world? It's there on that cross, and there in the empty tomb.

What is our response to this unfailing love? The Psalmist tells us that too! **"Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men."** Give thanks for the love of God shown to us in Jesus, for fulfilling the promise of the Savior. Give thanks for the forgiveness of sins, and for a clean conscience, a life free from guilt. Be thankful for the healing work of the Holy Spirit in Baptism and Communion.

Next he says, “let them sacrifice thank offerings!” For the Old Testament people these thank offerings were actual physical sacrifices. What is our act of worship and thanksgiving...? To offer our bodies as living sacrifices, to live God-pleasing lives, to deny ourselves the rebellious desires of our heart. We live in the power of the gospel and we flee to our Savior in every temptation. When the Netflix or the computer are leading you away, turn it off! Get out of there! Flee to your Savior, and don’t let yourself be in those situations in the first place.

Finally, it comes at the end of our verses but it is maybe the most important thing we can do. “Tell of his works with songs of joy!” What an amazing opportunity Thanksgiving Day provides for us to do that. It’s a day to spend with your family, but it just may be a mission field coming together in your own house or your Uncle’s house. If your family is like mine, there will be someone who has lost their connection with the Lord’s unfailing love. I know family can be the hardest ones of all to talk to. In theory, they’re the closest ones to us, and in reality, there are so many issues that complicate things. But the opportunity may be looking you right in the face.

Tell of the works Lord and his unfailing love. Maybe you have the tradition where you go around the table and say what you’re thankful for or maybe you’re the one who says the meal prayer. Think ahead of what it can be. Sure, it’s good to be thankful for our families and all the other things we have, but let the Lord’s unfailing love truly sing. “I have a God who gave himself up for me. I have a clean conscience and freedom from guilt because of Jesus. I have a new life to live, and eternal life to look forward to.” Let that be the thing you’re most thankful for when the turn comes to you. **Give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and tell of his works with songs of joy.**