

Thanks for Christmas
Psalm 50:22-23
November 28, 2010 (Kit)

We are right now, in time, standing between two out of three of our nations' great religious holidays. Thanksgiving is behind us and Christmas is ahead. In these two traditions we have the continual reminder of the hope we that comes from God. Let's start this message, therefore, with Thanksgiving, and end it with Christmas

TEXT: Psalm 50:22-23

22 "Mark this, then, you who forget God, lest I tear you apart, and there be none to deliver! 23 The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me; to one who orders his way rightly I will show the salvation of God!"

There are two kinds of people in this text. There are those who are torn apart, and those who glorify God. There are those who cannot be delivered and those whom God reveals His salvation. There are those who forget God and those who offer thanksgiving as a sacrifice. I think I would prefer to be the one who offers Thanksgiving, glorifies God, and is shown salvation. I want to be the one who orders his way aright, not the one who forgets God and is torn to pieces with none to deliver.

What this text tells us about God is that He both saves and condemns. Some people think that the God of the Bible is one of judgment and terror. That is why many people reject religion and don't believe. They have heard that the God of the Bible is vicious and dangerous and angry and vengeful. Verse 22 makes it clear that they are correct. God is all these things. There are those people on the earth who will be torn apart by God. He will come after them with a vengeance and He will destroy them in fire and anger. They will not be able to escape Him.

Some people, though, say that God is love and kind and forgives. They say that God desires the good of all and sends people to heaven, that He is capable of great kindness and mercy. This text makes it clear that they are correct. He is indeed the God who shows salvation freely. There are those people on earth who will know the salvation of God. The problem comes when we say God is one or the other, and not both. God is both the Judge and the Savior. He is not one or the other: He is both. He is dangerous to sinners and loving to sinners. The problem also comes when people think that the destiny of man is only one or the other. When we think that either there is no hope for anyone or that all people will be saved. Neither is true. Every person on earth will have one of two eternal destinies. Each one will either be torn apart by God or saved by God. There is no third path.

That leads me to a question. What is going on in this text? What is God trying to tell us? What advice is He giving us? Let's read it again:

22 "Mark this, then, you who forget God, lest I tear you apart, and there be none to deliver! 23 The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me; to one who orders his way rightly I will show the salvation of God!"

If we just read these two verses quickly, we might be tempted to believe that God is saying, “Either offer thanks to me or I’ll tear you apart!” It can sound like a threat! But to see this text in such terms misses the meaning. Let me explain the meaning within the context, and then we can move on to how Christmas fits in.

The ones who forgot God and get torn apart are not those who forgot to send God a Thanksgiving Day prayer. No, they are people who have a religion or a religious philosophy that they practice, but it is one that forgets God. The ones who “forget God” is not a reference to ones who have not thought about God. These people have a system. They offer sacrifice. They have a form of relating to God. This Psalm was written to ancient Jews. God is saying that some of them practice their religion; they go to festivals, the practice rituals. But they forgot that God doesn’t want their rituals unless they are from a sincere heart that loves God and loves His ways.

These people show up on the holidays and they bring their lamb or their bull and give them to the priest for sacrifice and they say their prayers. But they don’t love God or live for Him. They embrace their own sinful ways and do a little religion to get by. But God says to them, “I don’t need your bulls, I don’t need your lambs. I own all the cattle on all the hills.” You see, God doesn’t need anyone to give Him anything. That is not the purpose of worship. These folks worshiped in some way or another but the way they live their lives nullified their religion. The wicked thoughts of their hearts, and their sinful acts proved that their guilt was greater than their philosophy of God that allowed them to think of themselves as good.

These people are like us today. We have our forms of religion. We have our philosophy of God that satisfies our own minds that they we are okay. We say things like, “Well, I go to church on holidays, I sing a few songs, etc.” Or we say, “I believe God is not found in organized religion, but is with me everyday.” Or “I don’t believe anyone as amazing as God can be understood by man.” We have our religious systems and our philosophies that satisfy us. But we don’t take into account what God is actually like. The way you live your life nullifies your religion. The wicked thoughts of your heart and your sinful acts are proof that your guilt is greater than your philosophy of God that allows you think that you are good. Let me continue to explain by adding the role of Thanksgiving.

In our text, the ones who offered sacrifices of Thanksgiving glorified God and were shown His salvation. How does Thanksgiving work into the mix? It works like this: God gives. We receive. We don’t give and God receives. False religion says that we give and God receives. This is wrong. God doesn’t gain from us. We gain from Him. He doesn’t need us. We need Him. The one, who offers thanks from the heart, understands that he receives from God. Thanksgiving acknowledges His kindness. Thanksgiving acknowledges that you have received. Thanksgiving acknowledges that you have set aside your pride. The one who comes with religion or a philosophy of God that is not based on Thanksgiving is one who is proud, thinking he has something to offer to God. God doesn’t have a need that you can meet. He doesn’t need your religion, He doesn’t need your rituals, and He’s not impressed with your fancy philosophies that explain Him away or explain your need for Him away.

To come to God, you must see Him as He really is, not as you want Him to be. Those who forget God are those who see God as they want Him to be, not as He really is. Let's read not just our text again, but from early on in the Psalm and see what God is saying:

Psalm 50: 7 "Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, I will testify against you. I am God, your God. 8 Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you; your burnt offerings are continually before me. 9 I will not accept a bull from your house or goats from your folds. 10 For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. 11 I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine. 12 "If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine. 13 Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats?"

God says to the people of Israel, and to us, He doesn't need our religion. He won't be satisfied if we offer Him or religion or what we think is our argument that we are good enough for Him. He doesn't need us. Both the religious and the non-religious think that God should be satisfied with them for the way they live their lives. They are both in error!

14 Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and perform your vows to the Most High, 15 and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me."

God receives you when you come to Him needy and with Thanksgiving. You must be needy. You must realize that He gives, you gain. You have nothing to offer Him, but everything to Thank Him for.

16 But to the wicked God says: "What right have you to recite my statutes or take my covenant on your lips? 17 For you hate discipline, and you cast my words behind you. 18 If you see a thief, you are pleased with him, and you keep company with adulterers. 19 "You give your mouth free rein for evil, and your tongue frames deceit. 20 You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother's son. 21 These things you have done, and I have been silent; you thought that I was one like yourself. But now I rebuke you and lay the charge before you.

Mankind does evil. You and I do evil. But those whom God will tear apart are those who do their evil but convince themselves they are not so bad. They think that because God hasn't killed them yet or corrected them yet, they have Him figured out. They are wrong.

22 "Mark this, then, you who forget God, lest I tear you apart, and there be none to deliver! 23 The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me; to one who orders his way rightly I will show the salvation of God!"

This text is a warning. God will tear you apart in your wickedness. But this warning is so that you can turn from your sins and come to God.

This psalm is about two ways of approaching God. One is your way. Your way is wrong. It can be a religious way. It can be a philosophy of God. It can be a way you invent. It is wrong. If you seek to come to God your way, on your terms, then you are coming in your sins, in your pride and insulting Him. You're like a criminal in an orange jumpsuit and ankle chains telling the judge what the terms are. You are missing reality. The other way is His way. You approach Him humbly, needy, as one who has everything to lose and nothing to offer. Then you find mercy at His seat and offer Him thanks as is due Him. And this is where Christmas comes in.

You see, we gain peace with God not on our terms, but on His. What are His terms? The blood of an innocent man, the Son of God, is His terms. "There is One God and One Mediator between God and man, even the Man, Christ Jesus." Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the Life, no man comes to the Father except by me." "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God." "No greater love has anyone than this that a man lay His life down for His friends." "Christ died for sinners." The only way to come to God is not by giving, but by receiving. Jesus died for your sins, and you cannot receive Him unless you come to Him needy. You must have nothing; rely not on your religion or your goodness, but on Him who saves those who call on Him. And this is why there is Christmas.

Christmas is the revelation of God's terms for saving the righteous. "God sent his only begotten son." Jesus is the terms of peace between you and God. He is a gift from God to you.

Luke 2:10-14 10 And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

Thanksgiving is the sign that you come to God as needy, receiving His goodness and Kindness. Thanksgiving is your sign that you recognize that God gives, and you receive. Thanksgiving shows that you are seeing God as He is. The lack of thanks shows that you are looking at God as you have invented Him. He will tear you apart if you will not come to Him based on His Son.

Isaiah 53:10 10 Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for sin...

This is the gospel. God gives us salvation at great cost to Himself, free to us. Since this is true, that God Himself became flesh and was crushed for our sake, how can we respond on any other way than Thanksgiving? Any other response is sin.

