

Thanksgiving for God
Faith for the Past, Present and Future
Isaiah 40:8

During this time of upheaval socially, politically and morally there is much for us, as believers in Christ, to be thankful for; first and foremost, our Lord and Savior Jesus, and family and all those who are in our lives. As we consider all that we should be thankful for let me begin our time with a parable, one I heard some years ago, I am calling it the “Parable of the Anvil”. Once upon a time before there were cars and modern machines — a time when horses and carriages and wagons were common. When towns were smaller and life was not as complicated. There was a rural town and like most towns, there was a blacksmith shop with a large, heavy, well-worn anvil. One day a young boy, who had never left the farm, came with his father to town for the first time. Everything was new and different. As he walked with his father down the busy main street, he heard a loud clang . . . clang . . . clang. He said to his father, “What’s that?” and his father responded, “Come with me and I will show you”.

He took his son to the door of the blacksmith’s shop. There the boy saw a strong man, lifting a big heavy hammer high in the air and then swinging it down with great force, crashing down on a glowing red-hot piece of metal laid on top of the anvil. The hammer hit the anvil so hard sparks flew and that it made the boy wince with every blow. His father explained to his son that this was a blacksmith who made all kinds of metal pieces for wagons and carriages and plows and tools and horseshoes.

The little boy was fixed on one thing: the heavy hammer, swung by a strong arm and the great metal anvil. The hammer and anvil met each other with such a loud sound and with such a great force that the boy thought surely this anvil could not last much longer. The big, strong blacksmith paused for a moment to catch his breath and saw the boy standing in the doorway. As he looked at the boy, the lad asked, “Aren’t you going to break that thing?”, pointing at the anvil. But the blacksmith smiled and said, “This anvil is over a hundred years old and has worn out many hammers.”

The Bible: Forged in the Furnace of Truth

Here is the point of this parable. The Bible is an anvil of truth that has worn out a thousand hammers of man’s makings. In every generation, new, huge, heavy hammers are forged against the truth of the Bible. Strong men lift great man-made hammers and pound on the anvil of Scripture. People who desire to deny the past; with no historical perspective – are focused on the here and now, and want to change the future. They think as the boy did; surely the anvil of the Bible will be destroyed by their might as they hammer to change the world to what they desire. They say to themselves — “Surely the Bible will be destroyed.” People who study history and truth say, “The anvil of the Bible was forged in the furnace of divine truth and has worn out many hammers of men through the centuries.”

In the Old Testament, the prophet Isaiah gave words simple but eternally true, “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.” (Isaiah 40:8) Jesus, the Son of God, 700 hundred years later, said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.” (Matthew 24:35) Jesus is both the Living and Eternal Word of God forged in eternity past, who has always been. The anvil of the Bible survives the hammering of men because it is the Word of the everlasting God. Why does the anvil of the Bible not break from men’s hammering for thousands of years? Why does the Bible survive generation after generation as the

Living and powerful Book eternally inspiring and shaping the lives of millions of people? I believe the answer is found in two truths; First, God is eternal and endures from generation to generation. Second, the Bible is the inspired Word of the eternal God, the Creator of the universe and it is the only never changing truth.

Moses understood this truth saying, ¹“Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. ² Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.” (Psalm 90:1-2) Moses was a man of faith; it waned at times, he was beaten at times, but not broken because he believed in the anvil of God’s truth, he held on to God’s truth until he reached the promise. The writer of Hebrews knew, ⁸“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. ⁹ Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace ...” (Hebrews 13:8-9) Here was another man of faith with thanksgiving for God’s grace. The reason the Bible has worn out thousands of hammers is because it is the Word of God who endures from everlasting to everlasting, and because its central character is Jesus Christ who is the same yesterday, today and forever. The Word of God strengthens faith and gives one eternal hope.

The Hammers of Men

There are two reasons why I point this out. One is that I want to build my life on something that lasts. I think most of you would share my desire to not chase man-made bubbles that shimmer in the sun with beauty and pop as soon as you catch them. I do not want to build my life on the sand of men’s ambitions. I want to build my life on something durable — something like an anvil of God that breaks thousands of hammers of false truths and ambitions.

The other reason why I point out the indestructible toughness of the Bible is to contrast it with the incredibly short shelf life of the ever-changing remedies and

treatments and schemes of people and their promises that fade. Schemes of the world offer hope, but leave out God and Christ and sin and salvation and repentance and death and heaven and hell; the schemes of the world are forever falling short and changing with the times. The world leaves the great realities of God out of consideration as if they were non-realities, like unicorns and flat-earth theories. These treatments and remedies and schemes of hope put forth by the world are forced on the people of the world. The truth is the world does not want to face the reality of God. Let me ask, how many people notice how short is the life of God-neglecting promises of false hope given by the world?

Let me illustrate what I mean; wherever you turn, from books to talk shows to seminars, the diagnosis of our problems was the same: dysfunctional families of origin and abuses of society. Your problems come from your parents and society – you are not responsible. Past emotional pain and emptiness were the primal causes of our present misery and misbehavior. What is the remedy? Psychotherapy with sensitive non-judgmental counselors and support groups with those who feel your pain and understand your woundedness. However, the emptiness does not stop and continues. To avoid God, people chase the clouds of men's dreams. Without realizing or understanding they break their hammers on the anvil of God's truth and continue to come up empty and fractured.

Because mankind's solutions come up short, they are forever offering new solutions. Things of mankind are always changing because they do not address the real problem – people's sin and need for God. Diagnoses and remedies that are not built on the full embrace of God's Word - always fade. When the fad is over and the remedies come up short what is to be done? Well, there is a new excitement, a new scheme of hope. The new scheme is more biological and less psychological. In the place of the needy, hurting, wounded soul has - now arisen the dysfunctional brain. It is not the family of origin that has center stage, but hormones and genes and

chemicals and identity. What are the new books today? The promotion of self; Your best life now, you can be whatever you want to be. Choose your future and your gender. Surgery and medicines and drugs can make you into whatever you desire. The insurance companies love it because drugs seem more like “medicine,” and are cheaper than counseling and therapy, and chemicals promise more predictable results.

The point is this: I want my life to be built on something more durable than a 10 to 15 year-long therapeutic fad. Make no mistake, the present craze with genes and hormones and the Human Genome Project and chemical therapies — this excitement, too will fade and the world will move on to something else - in its wake will be left vast disillusionment. No fulfilled life. No fountain of youth. No utopia. No comfort at death. Millions of people will be left with the question, “Is there a more durable hope to build my life on? Is there a diagnosis of my condition and a remedy for my flaws and a promise for the future that will not pass by like a fad in one generation, and leave me feeling like an out-of-date fool using leeches to cure my headache?” The world will desire to keep people medicated, so they do not realize their true condition. When Ritalin has calmed you down and Prozac has cheered you up, then what? Now that cannabis is becoming common in almost every state and people can separate from reality – what is the future. The promise of these things seems so big, when in fact the payoff is so small. All the things that never change, all the things that last, all the really big things in life and eternity still wait to be addressed; God, Christ, sin, redemption, repentance, faith, forgiveness, death, heaven, hell and eternal life.

The Eternal Anvil of the Bible

This brings us back to where we started: there is a rugged, unchanging, solid anvil called the Bible. It has outlived all fads and broken thousands of hammers of criticism. It does not sweat the small stuff very much; its message deals with the big things that never change from generation to generation. What is this unchanging

message? The Bible is God's unchanging anvil of truth to build one's life upon. The message of the Bible deals with changing the lives of people molded by God upon the anvil of the Bible to deal with sin and one's need for Christ and how it builds faith.

God's the Anvil of Truth

“In the beginning, God ...” the first verse of the Bible, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” Truth: there is a personal, infinite, eternal, just, loving, holy God who made this universe and everything in it. God's purpose is for everything in the universe to reflect His glory, greatness, beauty, power, wisdom, justice and mercy. Truth: God has no beginning; He is absolute eternal reality and He depends on nothing. God tells us in His name is simply, “I Am” (Exodus3:14) This great and yet, personal eternal God made you, each person, to know Him and enjoy Him and your life is to display Him to the fallen world. The prophet Isaiah wrote the words of God, “bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, ⁷ everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.” (Isaiah 43:6-7) The prime reality of life is; God made us to enjoy and display His glory!

The Hammer of Sin

But the second great reality that the Bible teaches us - is man has fallen and is a sinner. If the purpose of our existence is to know and enjoy and reflect the glory of God as our highest value, then sin is our failure to do that. The apostle Paul puts it like this in the greatest letter ever written, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23) I would like you to notice 2 things with me; sin is about every person and sin is about God. All of have sinned; there is no exception. Sin has a deep effect on mankind's relationship with God. Sin hurts people, but this is not the main reason sin is evil. The main reason sin is evil is because it separates us from God and prevents people from living a life that trusts and worships God and brings

people true joy. People want to treat God like a raincoat; they leave Him in the closet, forgotten until it rains hard and they take Him out of the closet. God is not a raincoat for bad days; He is the giver of sunlight and the Creator of clouds and the Sustainer of every breath you take. God is the eternal Judge of all; both the living and dead. Understanding these truths, is to understand a person's neglect of God is a great evil and is sin and prevents people from living in His presence. The anvil of the Bible is clear; "For the wages of sin is death" this is true of all people, "but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23) Without Christ every person is under the sentence of God's eternal judgment – people are hammers being broken on the anvil of God. We will perish unless God himself provides a Redeemer to save us from our sin and from His wrath.

Eternal Life In Christ

This brings us to the third great reality of the Scriptures: the central character of history, Jesus Christ. Oh, for a thousand tongues to describe the greatness of the God-Man Christ Jesus! John speaks this truth, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ... ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:1-3, 14) Jesus Christ is the Son of God, eternal, without beginning and with the Father from everlasting to everlasting, truly God. Yet, Christ was made flesh, that is, He became human. Why? Because without a human nature He could not die. Christ purpose was to come to the earth to die for the salvation of mankind. He lived to die. Why? Why would God send his Son to die? Because God's heart toward us is not only wrath flowing from His justice, but also mercy flowing from His love. To satisfy both justice and love, God substituted his Son to die in our place. Jesus said, "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for

many.” (Mark 10:45) He came to give His life as a ransom to rescue sinners from hell. All who are saved from the wrath of God are saved only because their sin has been paid for by Christ. This is the center of Christianity. God sent His own Son to provide a substitute for all who would be saved from sin. A substitute life and a substitute death. Jesus Christ lived a perfect life of faith and obedience to God. He died a totally undeserved, horrific and obedient death by crucifixion. Therefore, all of us who are saved by Him from the wrath of God are saved because our sin is laid on Christ, and His righteousness is credited to us. As the prophet Isaiah wrote, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” (Isaiah 53:6) Apostle Paul said, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21) This is the center and heart of Christianity. This is the deepest need of every human being that no medicine and no therapy will ever touch.

The Anvil of Faith

I want to examine one last great Biblical reality. What must I do to be saved by Jesus Christ from my sin? How can I obtain forgiveness and acceptance with God? How can I prepare to die so that on the other side of this life I will have everlasting joy in the presence of God — and in that hope become the kind of risk-taking, humble, loving, sacrificial person that the world so desperately needs?

The answer of the Bible is: Trust Christ. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him (believes in Christ as God and Savior) should not perish but have eternal life.” Trust Christ that everything He says He has done and everything He says He will do; and everything He says, He is - He is. Trust him, and you will be saved.

In Christ, you will live the rest of your life in the place of greatest healing. Where is that? It is the solid, durable, invincible, anvil-like place between thankfulness toward the past and faith toward the future. The aim of psychotherapy and the aim of medicine is to give us temporary healing. But there is no place of greater, deeper, more lasting healing than to be in Christ with sins forgiven and heaven secured, living moment by moment looking back with thankfulness on all that God has done for us, and looking forward to all God promises; Christ changes everything and life lived in Christ becomes eternal.

Living in Christ is the greatest place to live. I invite you; I urge you, trust Christ and take your eternal place between bygone grace and future grace where gratitude and faith and thankfulness and confidence fill the soul and make it eternally well. Amen!