

Thanksgiving Psalm—Shout for Joy (Psalm 100) ZCC 11.24.13

Psalms 100: 1 Shout for joy to Yahweh, all you lands! 2 Serve Yahweh with gladness. Come before his presence with singing. 3 Know that Yahweh, he is God. It is he who has made us, and we are his. We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. 4 Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, into his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, and bless his name. 5 For Yahweh is good. His loving kindness endures forever, his faithfulness to all generations. (WEB)

WOW! It is almost Thanksgiving. I don't know where your year went, but mine basically slipped through my fingers. I've always heard that time flies when you are having fun—AND I AM, by the way—having fun. I also hear that when you get older time seems to run in double time. One of my friends says that life is like a roll of toilet paper—the closer you get to the end, the faster it goes. Not sure what to think of that.

All that said, I'm afraid to blink—because I'm afraid I'll miss Christmas. Let me put in a plug. Well, no real plug—just show up—because this Christmas is going to be a blast—service after service! I promise you won't be bored.

ANYWAY. Y'all know by now that I am a “why” person. My mom says that my first word was “why” and that my second word was “not” and I immediately put them together and my first sentence was “Why not?”

I'm not 100% sure that is true—but it SHOULD be...

When I was a small child it got me in trouble with my parents because they didn't know how to handle that challenge.

I was still a “why” person when I started to school—sometimes it got me in trouble and sometimes it got me good grades, especially in literature and poetry – because I wouldn't let something go until I had worn it out.

I was still a “why” person when I got a job as art director of an ABC-TV affiliate and that didn't work out all that well.

It was the same with the Air Force—not only did they not want to answer the question, they didn't want to hear it. Then I caught a break—when I worked for the state of Arkansas, I had a job where part of my job was to ask “why?” and I thought I was in heaven.

That same “why?” served me well when I went back to the University of Arkansas. It was a lot of fun to ask the question and then seek the answer.

When I went to seminary, I REALLY wanted to find out “why” and I asked that question a lot. I also got into a mess sometimes by asking it. I was totally shocked to find out that when it comes to religious things, some people expect you to just do what they say without asking or even thinking “why?”

I am so glad that God doesn't take that attitude in scripture. Very often we are told to do or not to do something and we are given the reason right on the spot—right there in the passage. Other times we have to look for it a bit. Sometimes we might even have to go to the source and ask God directly, “God WHAT did you mean by that?” God doesn't mind—his actions and his word stand the test of reason and God doesn't ever fear an honest “why” from anyone.

Like I said, though, sometimes we get the answer right away. In our passage for today, Psalm 100, we saw a song of thanksgiving—a call to celebrate God's person. In the passage, there is also a list of some of the reasons that God deserves that thanks and praise.

We will first look at HOW we are supposed to honor him and then we will look at why.

Now, we Bible-believing and Bible honoring Disciples of Christ always take the commands of scripture seriously, don't we?

Verse one is very clear. It says that God's people are to shout for joy to the LORD. How about that? How many times in your life have you shouted for joy to the LORD of LORDS and the King of Kings? If you have never done it or almost never—can you tell me why?

I honestly believe that where I grew up, they were afraid that if they ever got started that they might end up losing our dignity and they might even wind up turning Pentecostal and swinging from the chandeliers.

Let me tell you a story. I come from what was then an all-white county—and by virtue of that, went to an all-white church. But, from the time I was small, I was almost completely color-blind when it came to people. When I worked for the TV station, my best friend was black. He was also a choir director for a large and very accomplished all-black choir. For some reason, we got the idea that it would be a wonderful thing to have them come to my church on a Sunday night and perform.

Well, they came. The pastor was thrilled they were coming, but I don't think anyone else really was. They actually marched in singing, "Walk With Jesus" and as they marched, they clapped and stepped. [Show how that looked.] For an old-fashioned Baptist church, that looked WAY too much like dancing and set the tone for the rest of the night. Song after song, they were just fantastic—but with no response from the church at all.

Finally Ray, turned to the congregation and said, "You know, when I drove up tonight...I saw a cemetery on the other side of the road...now, what I want tonight is for every person here that is dead...please get up and go get in that cemetery..."

I can promise you that not one person cracked a smile. I think they WERE dead, just didn't realize it.

BUT—at Zion we aren't dead right? I didn't hear you. [Wait.] That's better.

Psalms 100 says “shout for joy” and I wonder if we can do that here at the Thanksgiving season? God's word says we are to shout for joy and in a minute, I will ask you to try your hand at it—but only after I tell you why.

Verse two says that we are to bring him joyful songs. We have done that today and it is important. We take that seriously. We always need to remember how important the music we sing is to us and to God.

This passage tells us a few more ways we are supposed to celebrate our adoption into his family.

We are to serve him with gladness. Do we do that? How do we? [Smiling and being excited to be here—and to do his work.]

We are to enter with thanksgiving and praise? Do we? How do we do that? [In our prayers and in our songs and in our conversations.]

Besides entering into his house with thanksgiving, we are also to live lives of giving thanks and praise. Do we do that? Do we regularly pray prayers of thanksgiving? Do we give thanks for our jobs and our families and our cars and our food?

OK—to make me feel better, let me ask the question--”Why?”

Psalms 100 says because the LORD or Yhwh is God. What is the significance of that? You serve a God that is THE God. In other churches I've sung a chorus that says, “what a mighty God we serve...” and that is reason enough. Your God is greater. Your God is more. Your God is GOD!

There are plenty of reasons to praise and give thanks.

God made us—and we are his—but he also RE-claimed us. Why is that important? [We had no way to return to him without his efforts through Christ.] We are the spiritual children of Abraham, what is the significance of that? [We are spiritually and literally God's chosen people.]

WE are his sheep—the sheep of his pasture. What does that mean? [Cared for, fed, watered, protected, and loved by the Good Shepherd.]

Then, in the last verse, we see that the LORD is good. This is not true of the little-g-gods. If you know mythology, you know that the gods of the Romans and the Greeks—and others—couldn't be fully trusted. Sometimes they tricked people. Sometimes they were evil. YOUR God can be trusted.

Just as it always has and always will—his love endures forever. You know love can be fickle. How many of you have been told by someone that they loved you and then they betrayed you? God's love doesn't work that way.

The last thing we find here is that God's faithfulness continues through all generations. That means that you can trust God to be faithful to your families even after you are gone. It means that God will love your children, grandchildren and on and on.

Wow! Sounds praise-worthy. Makes me want to shout, how about you?

God made us. We belong to God. We are his people, his children. We are the sheep of his pasture. We serve a good God – one whose love endures forever—continuing through the generations of his people.

If this is true, then we are to work for him joyously—singing songs of praise, serving with gladness, giving him thanks, praising his name—and according to this passage, shouting for joy to the LORD.

I'm going to try and take away all of your dignity here today. There are no chandeliers to swing on (well, just that one in the middle)—so you won't get THAT carried away...

[Read through the Psalm again—stopping for the congregation to say “praise God” or “God is good.”]