

“Thank Offerings” (2 Chronicles 29:27–31)(11.27.22)

2 Chronicles 29:27–31 (NIV84)

²⁷ Hezekiah gave the order to sacrifice the burnt offering on the altar. As the offering began, singing to the Lord began also, accompanied by trumpets and the instruments of David king of Israel.²⁸ The whole assembly bowed in worship, while the singers sang and the trumpeters played. All this continued until the sacrifice of the burnt offering was completed.

²⁹ When the offerings were finished, the king and everyone present with him knelt down and worshiped.³⁰ King Hezekiah and his officials ordered the Levites to praise the Lord with the words of David and of Asaph the seer. So they sang praises with gladness and bowed their heads and worshiped.

³¹ Then Hezekiah said, “You have now dedicated yourselves to the Lord. Come and bring sacrifices and thank offerings to the temple of the Lord.” So the assembly brought sacrifices and thank offerings, and all whose hearts were willing brought burnt offerings.

2 Chronicles 29:35–36 (NIV84)

³⁵ There were burnt offerings in abundance, together with the fat of the fellowship offerings and the drink offerings that accompanied the burnt offerings.

So the service of the temple of the Lord was reestablished.³⁶ Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced at what God had brought about for his people, because it was done so quickly.

The word of God for the people of God.

LET US PRAY.

Title: **“Thank Offerings”**

INTRODUCTION:

Joni Eareckson Tada of Joni and Friends International Disability Center wrote the foreword for the book, *Choosing Gratitude: Your Journey to Joy* by Nancy Leigh DeMoss. Here is an excerpt from that Foreword:

“So many people do things *for* me or *to* me—as a quadriplegic in a wheelchair, someone has to help me out of bed, pour the coffee, get me dressed, brush my hair, brush my teeth, blow my nose ... and I’m always quick to say, “*Thank you.*” And I mean it.

What's more, I say it a lot. I remember when Judy, my executive assistant, came into my office and asked if she could borrow \$10. I was busy, so I absentmindedly told her to take the bill out of my wallet, which she did. When I heard my purse snap shut, I automatically said in a cheery voice, "Thank you!" Immediately, a friend standing nearby said, "What did you thank *her* for? She's the one who ought to thank you." I guess **I'm just programmed to express gratitude to people.**

Oh, if it were only that way with the Lord Jesus. If only we were better "programmed" to be grateful—not only to people—but to Him, lifting appreciative prayers countless times during the day. Sadly, lack of gratitude—and often *ingratitude*—resides in our hearts. That's scary. Lack of a thankful spirit carries serious penalties—a quick read of Romans chapter 1 tells us that. And if a thankless spirit was the undoing of a generation eons ago, is it any different for us? In fact, you and I know God far better than those to whom He revealed Himself through mere creation—we have even *more* to be thankful for!

And so I've been giving thanks for most of my paralyzed life. Not only giving thanks "*in everything,*" as one part of the Bible tells us, but "always giving thanks to God the Father *for everything*" as another part commands (1

Thessalonians 5:18; Ephesians 5:19–20 NIV). Most of us are able to thank God for His grace, comfort, and sustaining power *in* a trial, but we don't thank Him *for* the problem, just finding Him in it.

But many decades in a wheelchair have taught me to not segregate my Savior from the suffering He allows, as though a broken neck—or in your case, a broken ankle, heart, or home—merely “happens” and then God shows up after the fact to wrestle something good out of it. No, the God of the Bible is bigger than that. Much bigger.

And so is the capacity of your soul. Maybe this wheelchair felt like a horrible tragedy in the beginning, but I give God thanks *in* my wheelchair ... I'm grateful *for* my quadriplegia. It's a bruising of a blessing. A gift wrapped in black. It's the shadowy companion that walks with me daily, pulling and pushing me into the arms of my Savior. And *that's* where the joy is.”

Joni Eareckson Tada has made her whole life a thanks offering to our God.

BODY:

The context of our scripture reading today, is King Hezekiah is reopening the Temple for worship. His father was King Ahaz, a very wicked king and idolater. He has just died and left the nation in a

terrible state of decline and depravity. They were threatened by enemies and the sin within the nation was rampant. Spears, arrows, and swords threaten them while gangrene had set in on all their limbs. The stink and decay had infiltrated every aspect of their society.

King Ahaz had closed the Temple of God. It was desecrated and being used for storage. Temple furnishings were emptied out. The doors of the Temple had been closed. This was a deliberate turning away from God. There was no worship of God. The lamps were extinguished – replacing light with darkness. The sacrificial system to deal with human sin was shut down.

Instead, King Ahaz set up altars to false gods throughout the city. In every high place of Judah, the Southern Kingdom, he set up worship centers to the idols of the surrounding enemies. He tried to bribe enemies by giving them valuables from the Temple, but to no avail. The more he conceded to Israel's enemies and false gods, the worse the situation became. There was no appeasing their voracious appetites.

When King Ahaz died, he was not considered worthy to have his bones among the tombs of the kings of Israel. That was the situation his son Hezekiah was handed. To set things right, what

should he do? What was most important? He could have sought peace treaties with the enemies. He could have raised and strengthened an army. He could have tried to improve the economy.

But, King Hezekiah did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father David had done. That is the second verse of this 29th chapter. The chronicler is saying that Hezekiah was like his ancestor, King David, having a heart for God, and not like the wicked father Ahaz. The most critical first step in the first month of the first year of his reign was to open the doors of the Temple of the LORD and repaired them.

This cannot help but bring to mind the words of the Lord Jesus in Revelation 3:7–8 (NIV84)

7⁷“To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:

These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.⁸ I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.”

Can you hear the echo of King Hezekiah’s actions?

We started repairs on our sanctuary this week. This is a real-life example that I will use as an illustration. I may not have all the technical facts exactly right, but they are what I understand to be accurate. But, this is a physical example that I want you to see in a spiritual way.

Our contractor is a student of old buildings and the architectural methods used in days gone by. I will just use his first name, Art. He shakes his head about how often modern thinking and methods demonstrate their lack of understanding of those methods.

A nail was put at the bottom of both sides of the balcony and a red string was drawn taut across them. In the center, the bottom of the balcony was about three inches below the red string. The center was sagging. Why did this happen? It is especially disconcerting because it was not that long ago that a large sum of money was raised to do a renovation of the balcony. But...the problem was not only with the balcony.

Many years prior to the balcony renovation, another contractor was in the space above the sanctuary. Believing they were doing a good thing, that added plywood to strengthen the rafters. They didn't know what Art knows. The roof rafters did not need reinforcement; at least, not that kind of

reinforcement. There was an unexpected downside, literally, to adding the plywood. A lot of weight was added above the sanctuary, including over the balcony. Now, additional support beams were added during the renovation, but it is still sagging.

Why? Please take down those two pictures, one on both of the old chimneys. You can see that they are covering holes. In 1869, when the sanctuary was built, they used wood stoves in the sanctuary to provide heat. The stovepipes went into those holes into the chimneys.

As time went by, there were advancements in heating technology. And, it was kind of messy and unsightly to have those stoves and wood in a worship space. The church leadership decided to create a small basement under the sanctuary and install a more modern furnace. I believe they used wood, then coal, and now it is natural gas. It was a very logical decision. The church would be heated more efficiently, and it would be a more pleasing worship space.

But once again, there were unexpected consequences. They had to dig out dirt to create room for the furnace. To make space for the furnace, two piers, or supports, for the floor joists were removed. Additionally, a couple of other piers

gradually became compromised because the surrounding ground was not as solid and some of it gradually slipped away.

My friends, this could be a parable. Each generation seems to think itself superior to the previous ones – smarter, better tools, better technologies. We do not intentionally demean what came before. We sincerely believe that we simply know better nowadays. We make logical conclusions, but because we often don't give credence to the wisdom of those in days gone by, we are ill equipped to see the unexpected consequences.

I tell you that the ground that we stand upon as Christians is Judaism. The piers for the floor joists of our faith are the pillars of the early Christian Church. There are pressures all around and from above. When the weight bears down upon the local church, the church must have a firm foundation. Whenever any of the essential pillars of the Christian faith are compromised, the floor begins to give way to the pressures.

Let me give you another real-life example. Last Sunday night, we had the Emmaus Church annual Church Conference. But it wasn't at Emmaus Church, it was a multi-church event up at First United Methodist Church of Tuckerton. Several

churches had their meeting at 3:30. This was followed by a joint worship service. At 4:30, several more churches, including Emmaus had their Church Conference. Even though there were eight churches involved, I don't think there were more than 30 people at the joint worship service.

The elder who presided over our Church Conference was surprised that there were eight of us. He said the numbers had been getting smaller and smaller. And he is the senior pastor of a church of several hundred members. I told him that I would close the door before I responded to his observation.

I told him that the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference had made a serious error when they went to this current model for Church Conferences. On what do I base that conclusion? The decision of the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference for this new method was based on business model thinking. By consolidating Church Conferences, the required time for the District Superintendents would be significantly reduced.

But, there were unexpected consequences. The Church Conference was originally designed to be about the Local Church. The local church makes reports and votes on their leadership for the coming year. It also gave the average church goer

an opportunity to meet the District Superintendent who is literally the face of the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference.

Under this newer model, everything has been flipped upside down. Naturally, the average church goer is less likely to travel a half hour or more to a different church; so, attendance and participation is going to decrease. Most significantly, the emphasis has shifted. Instead of being IN and ABOUT the local church, it has become a function of the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference. My friends, it has become all business focused and has had its foundations completely shifted.

Let's get back to King Hezekiah. He called the priests and the Levites together, 2 Chronicles 29:5 (NIV84) and said: "Listen to me, Levites! Consecrate yourselves now and consecrate the temple of the Lord, the God of your fathers. Remove all defilement from the sanctuary.

First, the ministers of God must be cleansed and sanctified before they can address the state of the Church. You cannot preach and teach sanctification with power and effectiveness if you are not living it. The Levites and priests could not consecrate the Temple of the Most High God if their hands were defiled. Everything they touched would then become defiled. Surely you can see how this

applies in our day and the modern Church of Jesus Christ.

This week, I attended an Ecumenical Service of Thanksgiving. I intend for this to be as anonymous as possible. The four major Protestant denominations were the participants. With four local churches, the total attendance was less than 50. This hardly seems like a broad proclamation of Thanksgiving.

There were three clergy and one layperson. The layperson represented a major denominational local church that has had problems keeping a pastor for many years. Two of the three clergy have not consecrated themselves. By biblical standards, they have defiled hands. It is not hard to understand why the life-force of these churches is weak and continues to decline.

The sermon that was delivered was on a scripture from which I have recently preached. So, I was very familiar with it. The message delivered was very human centered and not God-centered. It deliberately avoided the hard issues addressed in God's holy inspired inerrant word. There was no power. There was no Spirit. It is no wonder that our mainline Protestant denominations that have given sway to the ways of the world and are in dramatic decline. We are talking 30 to 50% decline

in the last twenty years. Many doors have been closed.

In about sixteen days, the Levites and the priests had consecrated themselves and the Temple. The idols and the debris, anything that was unclean, had been dumped into the Kidron Valley and burned. They reported to King Hezekiah, "We have purified the entire temple of the LORD, the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the table for setting out the consecrated bread, with all its articles."

Now, it is time for worship to resume in God's holy Temple. Many animals were sacrificed as a sin offering to atone for all Israel. The Levites worshiped the LORD with cymbals, harps, and lyres. The priests proudly trumpeted in praising God. As burnt offerings were made, there was music. The whole assembly bowed in worship, while the singers sang and the trumpeters played.

They continued worship by reading scriptures. Then they sang praises with gladness and bowed their heads and worshiped. 2 Chronicles 29:31 (NIV84)

Then Hezekiah said, "You have now dedicated yourselves to the Lord. Come and bring sacrifices and thank offerings to the temple of the Lord." So the assembly brought sacrifices and **thank**

offerings, and all whose hearts were willing brought burnt offerings.

One scholar explains the thank offering: “The offerings of the people are of two types: thank offerings and burnt offerings. The thank offering was one form of the offering of well-being, or peace offering. In this sacrifice, a portion was burned on the altar, a portion was given to the priests for their use, and the remainder was returned to the worshiper, to be consumed in a feast. As might be expected, the offering of well-being was offered on occasions of celebration; the thank offering, in particular, was offered in thankfulness for God’s blessing or deliverance.

The burnt offering, on the other hand, involved incinerating the entire animal on the altar. Only the hide was not consumed, but was given to the priests for their use. This sacrifice, then, truly was a sacrifice—the worshiper got nothing material back; in economic terms, it represented a total loss. Burnt offerings were made for a variety of reasons: as a plea for forgiveness, as the fulfillment of a vow, or as a demonstration of grateful praise. Here in Chronicles, the motivation for these voluntary offerings is gratitude at the Lord’s forgiveness. Certainly, we as well should respond to God’s love and deliverance with thankfulness and praise.”

CONCLUSION:

Alexander Maclaren preached: "Sacrifice has been the essential feature in all religions before Christ. It has dropped out of worship wherever Christ has been accepted. Why? Because it spoke of a deep, permanent, universal need, and because Christ was recognized as having met the need. People who deny the need, and people who deny that Jesus on the Cross has satisfied it, may be invited to explain these two facts, written large on the history of humanity.

The last stage in Hezekiah's great sacrifice was 'thank-offerings,' brought by 'as many as were of a willing heart.' And will not the self-devotion, kindled by the fire of love, speak in daily life by practical service, and the whole activities of the redeemed man be a long thank-offering for the Lamb who 'bears away the sins of the world'? And if we do not thus offer our whole lives to God, how shall we profess to have taken the priceless benefit of Christ's death?

Hezekiah followed the order laid down in the Law, and it is the only order that leads to the goal. First, the atoning sacrifice of the slain Lamb; next, our identification with Him and it by faith; then the burnt-offering of a surrendered self, with the song of praise sounding ever through it; and last, the

life of service, offering all our works to God, and so reaching the perfection of life on earth and antedating the felicities of heaven."

In response, let us now open the doors of our personal temple, our hearts, for cleansing, renewal, and thanksgiving. Please turn to #892 of the hymnal.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION, ASSURANCE, AND PARDON

Our heavenly Father,

Who by thy love hast made us
and through thy love hast kept us,
and in thy love wouldst make us perfect:
We humbly confess that we have not loved thee
with all our heart and soul and mind and strength,
and that we have not loved one another
as Christ hath loved us.

Thy life is within our souls,
but our selfishness hath hindered thee.

We have not lived by faith.

We have resisted thy Spirit.

We have neglected thine inspirations.

Forgive what we have been:

Help us to amend what we are;
and in thy Spirit direct what we shall be;
that thou mayest come into the full glory of thy

creation, in us and in all the people;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Silent prayer.

The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. If anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

Thanks be to God.

At the conclusion of service, I invite you to join us for a meal of thanksgiving. You need not to have brought anything. You only need to bring a Thanks Offering.

Amen and amen. Let us pray.