

Sermon Series: “Lessons from King David on Thanksgiving”
“The Past”
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The past can be a tricky thing. It can be good, and it can be bad. What was your past like? E.g., I knew of someone who had a hard go of it, with a Dad who was abusive physically and who kept the family on edge; even as adults these stories can evoke the same painful emotions. But there are other stories of the past that I have heard told with great affection. E.g., I recall driving with my very good friend Pic Cyr to his home in Jeanerette to visit his Mom; he loved his parents and childhood in that small Cajun town, and he took me upstairs to see an elaborate model train on tracks with depots and village stops, and it was almost like this train set was untouched for 50 years, which it perhaps was. What do you think of when you think of the past? Was it good? Was it bad? More importantly, how does our relationship with the Lord affect the way we remember and deal with the past? Today we are going to look at the past in relationship to preparing us for Thanksgiving.

READ Psalm 37:25 (p. 511)

CONTEXT: Psalm 37 is a psalm of David. It addresses those who follow the evil path away from the Lord and those who follow the good path of the Lord. It instructs the good not to be envious of the bad, for they will receive the Lord's judgment. The good are provided for by the Lord, even though it might not be immediate.

READ v 25. "King David in this psalm compares the righteous and the wicked, and he does so from his own length of days. This makes him all the more worth considering. Cf. Proverbs 16:31." We seem to live in an age over the last century, and especially over the last 50 years, where true wisdom is seen with the young. E.g., I saw when I was younger where rock stars, like Madonna, affected the way girls dressed, and boys wanted to be cool like "The Fonz" in the tv show "Happy Days". We see this with young people today where they are more interested in what their peers have to say rather than their parents—and we know what that is like, because we've "been there, done that"! But I put before you today that that way of thinking is truly upside-down. It is the opposite of the truth. Wisdom, if it is to be had, resides more often with those with length of years than those with a couple of decades to their name. This is not always true, but generally it is. E.g., I recall the great Hollywood iconic actress was being interviewed on the Johnny Carson "Tonight" show in the late 1980s and she was smoking and saying unkind things about another actress by name, and I could not help but think this looked like adolescent rebellion—and she was in 79 at the time! But very often with the length of years comes wisdom, especially for the person who has followed Jesus, the fountain of wisdom. At times this is recognized, as in 1966 when Joni Mitchell came out with the thoughtful song "Both Sides Now", where she explores the meaning of life and love, and she received criticism of her song because she was only 23 when she wrote it, so what

could she know about life and love and both sides of them? Have you ever met an older person who is truly wise and from whom you could learn? E.g., I recall when I was in my 20s there was an older gentleman in my home church, Mr. Wilcox, who was in his 90s, and there were times I would go to his house and eat Popeye’s chicken and red beans and rice— he loved it!— and I would find out about his life; during World War II he worked as an engineer for a boat company that would travel down to Central America for fruit and come back to New Orleans, and he said every time he went below deck to tend to the engines he did not know whether he would return because of the German U-Boats in the Gulf. He was a courageous man, a man of who handled his duties with maturity and responsibly, and I tried to soak in all he was saying. E.g., I recall the wisdom of Mr. Herbert Marx, who lived past 100 and still came to church and he loved the Lord, and Randy and I would tell him every Sunday it was good to see him, and he would say, “It is good to be seen”, and that simple phrase communicated how he appreciated each day, and so should we. E.g., I recall talking to my Dad about his life, and he told me every day he prayed for the from the Lord’s Prayer, “lead me not into temptation”; I was struck by this, because he seemed to me a man oblivious to temptation, but the truth was he was not oblivious, and if that were true, neither am I. E.g., I have seen much wisdom in my Mom, and it always impresses me that she still has a heart for others to come to know Jesus, and she sends me to her next door neighbor to deliver the Upper Room to them when it comes out, and she wants the owners of a local Chinese restaurant also to know about Him. Length of years often communicates a life well-lived. Proverbs 16:31 states, “Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life.”

“In the context, King David has seen the wicked wither and the righteous flourish, and in v 25 he declared that the righteous and their progeny have not been forsaken. Cf. Exodus 34:6-7; Psalm 9:9-10; Jeremiah 32:18.” Such

promises are regularly part of the Bible. In Exodus 34:6-7 God promises blessings on those who follow Him to the 1,000th generation, but repaying the wicked to the third and fourth generation. This is not meant literally, but rather is expressive of the great power of the effect of following the Lord and how He desires to bless those generations, and how God will allow the evil of a generation to continue unless repentance comes. In our psalm, King David recognizes that for the moment things may go badly for the righteous— as vv 12 and 14 show— but in the long run God’s hand of protection will prevail, even into eternity. E.g., I think we see that in the U.S. today; we have been a nation, in name at least, that fears God, and we have been blessed in that, because a nation governed by the people and for the people can only go so far unless the people have an internal ethical governor, and an internal ethical governor need the power of the Holy Spirit. We are a nation that at this point are threatening to abandon the Lord by its secular policies— such as setting up laws protecting abortion, various understandings of marriage and gender, and the way to protest— like last summers destruction of public and private property with impunity and attempting to negate some of our great leaders of the past, like George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. But we still have in a sense a “residue” of Christian influence on our policies and way of treating one another. We are still blessed as a nation, and families are blessed when they follow the Lord, and this extends to future generations. King David knew God’s faithfulness to him. Early on in his life the prophet Samuel anointed him King of Israel; God told Samuel not to look on the outward appearance to find the next king after Saul, for God looks on the heart. Apparently, David’s brothers were more impressive in outward appearance, but God chose David. God kept him safe from Saul’s attempts to kill him, and God set David on the throne first of Judah, and then over both Judah and Israel. David, like us, was not a perfect man, but God provided for him, and David knew it. Have you seen other people make

such claims? E.g., I recall hearing about a woman who is middle-aged, and she has said that if her life ended now that she would be thankful for all God had done for her in her life. E.g, I have known people who would be considered by American standards poor, but if you talked to them and visited in their homes, you would not know it— they were thankful for what God had done for them in their lives. E.g., the man, whom I mentioned at the beginning of this message who had an abusive father, knows God’s continued healing of the past trauma and drama. I love the instruction the writer of Proverbs 30:8-9 gives: “Remove from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that need, or I shall be full, and deny you, and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ or I shall be poor, and steal, and profane the name of my God.”

“As we examine our past experiences, how has God been faithful to you and me?” This week I encourage you and me to take an intentional mental walk back into the past. How has God blessed you? I recall when I was 16 and came back to Christ to walk with Him, it was Psalm 9:9-10 that caught my attention— that the Lord would be a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble, and those who know Your name O Lord will trust in You, for You O Lord will not forsake those who seek You. I have seen that in the Lord’s provisions of the parents I have, my education, my wife, my children, the churches I have served, and specifically the church I currently serve. And these are just tips of the iceberg. I encourage us to recount before the Lord His provision for us in the past. And then to share it with at least one person!