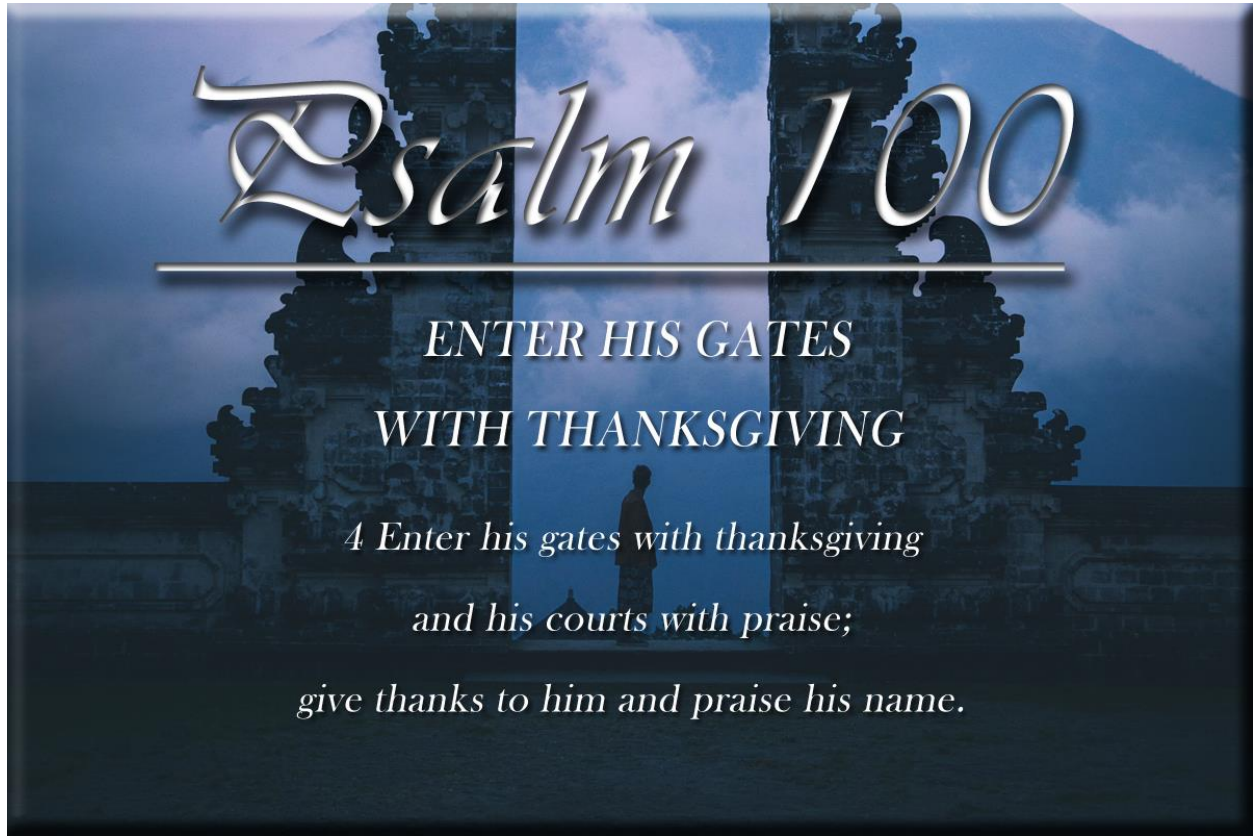


November 20, 2022

Enter his Gates with Thanksgiving

Psalm 100:4

**“Enter his gates with thanksgiving  
and his courts with praise;  
give thanks to him and praise his name.”**



Special Music:

“Give Thanks”

Janella Salvador

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PYRqB26rPIs>

## WAITING AT THE GATE

I stand before the gate

And wait.

I know the gate will open,

Though words are left

Unspoken

I need only press forward,

Toward

My inherited unmerited reward.

But still, I hesitate

And wait.

Pausing to remember

That which I have forgotten,

Begotten

Memories of formalities

And a state of spirit and of mind.

If only I could find

That mindful sting

And synaptic string

That I see to bring

Me into a proper state

And so... I wait.

Will someone come

To remind me of what

I haven't done?

A flashing sign

In my mind  
“Enter His Gates with... relief.”  
Is that the phrase  
That demonstrates belief,  
As I press forward  
Through heaven’s doors?  
Nay!  
Not quite the words  
In recourse due,  
And yet  
A phrase that rings out true.  
And I wait...  
Knowing the words will come  
To my lips, speaking from  
My soul,  
A Place where promises kept  
And light reflects  
The presence of my living God.  
I am thankful.  
And there it is.  
“Enter His Gates with... Thanksgiving.”  
A renaissance of enlightenment  
Casting an attitude of gratitude.  
The gates swing wide  
Allowing me inside  
To feast at the table  
Of my Creator.

Have you ever had a friend give you something from out of the blue? It wasn't something that you thought you needed or ever planned to buy. It could have been anything from a piece of art, or a fishing reel, or a beautiful bowl, or a nice coat, or even some help with fixing your car or painting your house. Whatever it was, it was totally unexpected. You had never told them that someday you might want it and it never came up in casual conversation. One day, they just showed up and said, "I was cleaning out the spare room, and I thought you might like this," or "I was out shopping, and this reminded me of you. It just seems like something you might like to have."

And sometimes, they are absolutely correct. You hadn't thought about it, but since they gave it to you it's been hanging on your wall, or mounted to your favorite fishing rod, or hanging in your closet. And suddenly, you find yourself using it, or wearing it. And you like it. You might even say you love it. Because now, you simply can't imagine being without it. Every time you look at it or use it, you think of your friend fondly, even if you have become separated over the years.

I have two types of things in my house, very much like other people. Those things that are handy but mean nothing to me at all. I could easily replace them with something else and it wouldn't matter. If they wear out, I can just as easily move onto a newer version. But I also have things that were given to me by people that cared about me. Things that I find irreplaceable. Even if they break, I find it hard to move on to something that will replace them. I have tools from my dad, pictures from friends, even kitchen stuff that holds meaning for me, simply

because it reminds me of the person that gave it to me. I, for one, find it hard to let go of those kinds of things. I have broken watches, cufflinks when I don't have a single shirt with French cuffs, a couple of shirts, robe, and ties that belonged to my dad, gifts from photographers and musician friends, and all sort of other things that bring back memories of good times; mostly of people who are no longer around and it is my way of holding onto those memories.

When I allow the gates of those memories to open, I picture that person and I smile. And I utter a "thank you." Thank you for allowing me to be a caretaker of your soul. Thank you for letting me be a part of your life. Thank you for thinking enough about me that you did not want me to forget about you. Thank you for returning me to moments of joy. Thank you for being my friend.

You might find it a little corny, but I have always been somewhat sentimental. I think that's true of all of us to some extent. And the closer the relationship, the more important those things become. Those things will never mean the same thing for whoever claims them after we are gone. That's because there is no relationship tied to them. While my children might find some value in those things that belonged to my parents, those things will never mean the same to them because they never knew my parents. I have a treasure chest jewelry box that a friend gave me in high school. It's old and worn out. Nobody else is ever going to want it. But I like it and I think of the person that gave it to me over forty years ago. I am personally attached to it. But when I'm gone, it will most likely wind up on the trash heap, because it simply doesn't mean anything for anyone else.

Those special items act like gates for us, opening memories that we don't necessarily keep at the forefront of our brain. They provide "ahhh" moments. And it's kind of like an inside secret because no one else can experience those "ahhh" moments when you see or use one of those items.

Looking through the gates to heaven to catch a glimpse of what is to come, is a similar experience.

**"Enter his gates with thanksgiving  
and his courts with praise;  
give thanks to him and praise his name."**

Each of us has our own special relationship with God. That is because God has seen us through the worst times in our lives. He's been with us in those moments that we thought we were all alone. He's been with us when the pain was more than we could stand. He's been with us in those moments when we felt everyone else had deserted us. He's sat beside us as we watched the majesty of mountains, the crashing waves of the ocean, the heat rising off the desert, the rising and setting of the sun, and when we are laying on our backs watching the stars come out. He often shares moments with us that nobody else is around to share. And it is so very comforting to feel His presence in those times.

When we step up to those gates of heaven, we recall that relationship. We see it in the fullness that it is. We remember those wonderful times of companionship that no one else was privy to.

**But here is the fascinating thing, God gives us an option on how we choose to handle that moment. The first is what I call “Disneyland Moment.” If you have never been to Disneyland or Disney World, you might not understand this reference. There is just something about going to Disneyland or Disney World that is “more special” than going to Six Flags, Dollywood, Knott’s Berry Farm, or Universal Orlando. You save up for years in preparation of experiencing what many consider the ultimate theme park. Then you buy your ticket and take it up to the gate with anticipation of what is to come. It’s an “I have arrived” moment. As a matter of fact, it becomes all about the anticipation. The destination becomes more important than the journey.**

**I hear people talk about it all the time. “When I get to heaven, the first thing I’m going to do is... blah, blah, blah.” For whatever reason, we can get our bearings out of whack. Heaven is not a theme park. It’s true that we would all like to go there, but the price is every steep. Too steep for mortal humans. No, someone else has to buy the ticket. And they did. Jesus paid the ultimate price so that we could have that ticket. But it isn’t about the ticket. The goal is not about getting to heaven. I know a lot of us treat it that way, but the ticket and the destination are not near as important as the relationship.**

**I am sad to say that the “Disneyland Moment” has been a common promoted theme for many preachers for a long time. It’s the “repeat the sinner’s prayer, get baptized, help others, do the right thing, and Jesus hands you a ticket to heaven.” I’m not sure that Jesus would approve of that message. Those are all good things, but they ignore the journey, the relationship, the sacrifice of the**

cross, in lieu of something less dramatic and somewhat more shallow. It becomes a list of things to do to get into heaven. And, as I have told you before, that is simply not the message Jesus is bringing to us.

Jesus focused on the journey. Yes, heaven is a great reward, but we don't form a relationship with Jesus Christ just to get into heaven. We form a relationship with Jesus Christ so that we can serve others in His name, to become His hands and feet in this world. It's the journey that brings us joy.

There is a story in Luke 17:11-19 that reads like this:

**11 Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee.**

**12 As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance**

**13 and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"**

**14 When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed.**

**15 One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice.**

**16 He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.**

**17 Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?"**

**18 Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?"**



**19 Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”**

There is a whole sermon in this story, but we will have to save it for another day. Instead, I want us to consider the takeaway, which is the most important part of this particular story. When you read it carefully, it’s not about the healing, although that is a miracle that Jesus performed. The story is more about the journey than the destination. More about the relationship than the reward. All ten men were healed. Jesus didn’t take that back. But only one man, a foreigner, a Samaritan, was willing to **“enter His gates with thanksgiving”**. Only one man, a foreigner, a Samaritan, was willing to **“enter His courts with praise.”** Only one man, a foreigner, a Samaritan, realized that the relationship was more important than the healing.

Psalm 100 shows us the way God wants us to approach our heavenly reward. Rather than a “Disneyland Moment,” He wants us to remember the journey. He wants us to look at those gates, not to covet what’s on the other side, but to embrace the relationship that got us to that moment. It is a personal thing. A thing between our brother Jesus and ourselves. If our first thought upon approaching that gate is anything other than “Praise God. Thank you, Jesus,” we have missed the point.

Some people see those gates as pearly white. That is the way they are referenced in Revelation 21:21. But, that is not how I see them. I see them as blood red, a reminder of the price that Christ paid for me to be standing in that moment. While some may dwell on their mansions and streets of gold, I bask in

the knowledge that I will, at long last, be standing in the very presence of my Creator, with my brother Jesus at my side.

The Psalmist wants us to understand, to get our attitude right, to realize that this is not a “Disneyland Moment.” He wants us to understand that this was God’s plan all along. God wants to get to know each and every one of us. He wants to make it personal, because... well, it is personal. This is not about grabbing the golden ticket out of His hand and rushing through the gate, but about us walking through the gates with Him, entering his home that He is wanting to share with us. There will be ultimate joy in that moment.

**“Enter his gates with thanksgiving  
and his courts with praise;  
give thanks to him and praise his name.”**

This week, let’s pay attention to and reflect on those things around us that remind us of friends gone by and friends still with us. Let us ponder the journey that we have with Christ and engage with the “joy” moments, the “comforting” moments, and the “praise” moments. Let’s figure out how to enjoy the journey even more than the destination as Jesus continues to walk with us.

God bless you all!

AMEN



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