

31 December 2024
Year-End Thanksgiving Service
Looking Back with Gratitude, Looking Forward with Hope

Ps. 150

Isaiah 33.17-end

1 John 5.13-end

Luke 17.11-19

As the year comes to an end, it's natural to pause and reflect on the journey we've travelled. The triumphs, challenges, joys, and sorrows of the past year all come into focus. While the world often closes the year with parties and celebrations, for us as believers, it is an opportunity to come before God with grateful hearts and renewed hope. This evening, as we meditate on the Word of God, we are reminded that gratitude unlocks blessings, hope sustains us, and faith leads us forward. The selected passages - Psalm 150, Isaiah 33, 1 John 5, and Luke 17 - invite us to end the year in thanksgiving and begin the new year in faith, trusting in God's promises.

1: "A Symphony of Praise" (Psalm 150)

"Let everything that has breath praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!" (Psalm 150:6) Psalm 150 is a powerful crescendo of praise. It teaches us that no matter how the year has unfolded, we are called to end it in worship. The psalmist invites every living being to lift their voices in thanksgiving for the greatness and goodness of God. The instruments mentioned - trumpets, harps, strings, and cymbals - represent the variety of ways we can offer our praise. As we reflect on the past year, we might recall both blessings and hardships. Yet, even in the midst of difficulties, God has been faithful. Every breath we take is a reason to praise Him. When we look back and see His hand guiding us, protecting us, and providing for us, our hearts overflow with gratitude. A well-known hymn, *"Count Your Blessings,"* reminds us to name our blessings one by one. Like the psalmist, we are called to look for God's fingerprints in our lives and respond with joyful worship. As we end the year, let us join the heavenly symphony, lifting our hearts in praise, knowing that our God is worthy of all honour and glory.

2: "A Vision of Hope" (Isaiah 33:17-24)

"Your eyes will see the king in his beauty and view a land that stretches afar." (Isaiah 33:17) Isaiah's prophecy offers a vision of the future - a promise of restoration, peace, and a land of abundance. This vision would have been a source of hope for the Israelites during their time of distress. As the year ends, this passage reminds us that we serve a God of hope, who turns mourning into dancing and despair into joy. In the past year, there may have been moments of uncertainty or sorrow. Yet Isaiah reminds us that our hope is not in circumstances but in the King of kings, who reigns in beauty and righteousness. This hope is not wishful thinking but a confident expectation rooted in the character and promises of God. Imagine a weary traveller walking through a desert, longing for an oasis. Isaiah's vision is like that refreshing oasis - a glimpse of what God has prepared for those who trust Him. As we look ahead to the new year, let us hold on to the vision of God's kingdom - a kingdom where healing, justice, and peace prevail.

3: "Living in the Assurance of Eternal Life" (1 John 5:13-21)

"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life." (1 John 5:13) John's epistle offers assurance to believers: eternal life is not just a future promise but a present reality for those who believe in Jesus Christ. This assurance gives us peace as we reflect on the past and courage as we step into the future. The apostle John also reminds us of the power of prayer and the confidence we have in God's response. As we end the year, this is a time to recommit ourselves to a life of prayer, trusting that God hears and answers according to His will. Consider the peace of a child who knows they are loved and secure in their parent's care. Similarly, we can live with peace and boldness, knowing that we are held in the hands of our loving Father. As we move into the new year, let us live in the light of this assurance, drawing strength from our eternal relationship with God.

4: "Gratitude That Leads to Transformation" (Luke 17:11-19)

"Rise and go; your faith has made you well." (Luke 17:19) The story of the ten lepers healed by Jesus illustrates the importance of gratitude. While all ten were cleansed, only one returned to give thanks. His gratitude brought him not only physical healing but spiritual wholeness. As we reflect on the blessings of the past year, how often have we paused to thank God for His goodness? Gratitude transforms us - it shifts our focus from what we lack to what we have received. It deepens our faith and aligns our hearts with God's will. The story is a reminder that gratitude is not just about saying "thank you" but living a life that reflects our appreciation for God's grace. Just as the one leper returned to Jesus, we are called to return to Him daily in worship, surrender, and obedience. As we step into the new year, let us resolve to cultivate a lifestyle of gratitude, recognizing that every good gift comes from above (James 1:17).

Conclusion:

As we close the chapter on this year and step into a new one, let us do so with hearts full of praise, hope in God's promises, assurance of eternal life, and a commitment to gratitude. The lessons from Psalm 150, Isaiah 33, 1 John 5, and Luke 17 remind us that God is faithful, His kingdom is glorious, His gift of eternal life is secure, and gratitude transforms our lives. No matter what the year has held, we can trust in the God who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Let us face the future with faith, knowing that the One who brought us through this year will walk with us into the next.

Prayer:

Gracious and Loving God, As we stand on the threshold of a new year, we look back with gratitude for Your faithfulness and forward with hope in Your promises. Thank You for the blessings, lessons, and even the challenges of this past year. Lord, we commit the coming year into Your hands. Fill us with praise for Your goodness, hope for Your kingdom, and assurance of Your eternal life. Help us to live with grateful hearts, trusting in Your guidance and grace. May we shine as lights in this world, bringing glory to Your name in all we do. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, we pray. Amen.