

I GIVE YOU THANKS

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Church, the question that might be surfacing as we think of Thanksgiving could be “For what?” and the emotions that’s attached to that question could span the gamut from maybe gentle sarcasm to just outright disdainful scorn – ‘For what?’ or ‘For what!’ And yet, as we look at all that is going on in our lives, there must be some place at which we need to land, especially today on Thanksgiving. You may come back to me and say, “It doesn’t change anything because look at me! I’ve been jobless for months. I haven’t received a salary since this COVID pandemic.” Or maybe you’re getting just half the salary that you were getting. Or your business has come to a standstill. Or maybe you’ve lost a loved one during this time. And the list could go on. While I sympathize gently with you, I must say that as citizens of God’s kingdom, sons and daughters of the most High God, we are called to have a different response.

The late Billy Graham once said: “Nothing turns us into bitter, selfish, dissatisfied people more quickly than an ungrateful heart. And nothing will do more to restore contentment and the joy of our salvation than a true spirit of thankfulness.” How true! That an ungrateful heart can make us bitter and selfish and self-centered, whereas contentment gets restored when we can focus on the many joys that come to us from our heavenly Father and a true spirit of thankfulness.

So cynicism cannot be our attitude because sprinkled all across the Bible is the word ‘hope’. And hope always points us to tomorrow, and the fact that it can bring the wherewithal to weather the storm, withstand the circumstance or steer us through the situations that we face. So we don’t dig a hole and hunker down hoping for the day to pass, but we meet it in the assurance that there is hope, and hope is anchored in the Word of God. And the Word of God, beloved, is a secure foundation. So let’s examine what the Word of God says to us about being thankful.

A. That we should and we ought to be thankful people.

Romans 1:21 *Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn’t worship Him as God or even give Him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds became dark and confused.*

And then v. 24 says, *God abandoned them to do whatever shameful things their hearts desired.*

So when we don’t honor or thank God, we lose sight of who God is and begin to focus on worshipping and acknowledging the creature or the creation rather than the Creator. So we should and we ought to be thankful people.

B. As children of the most High God, we need to be thankful children.

Let me give you a sampling of verses that talk about this.

1 Thessalonians 5:18 *In everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.*

The will of God for you and for me is to give thanks in every situation.

Psalm 118:1 *Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His love endures forever.*
For God is good and His love is an everlasting love and so we give Him thanks.

Psalm 107:21 *Let them give thanks to the Lord for His unfailing love and His wonderful deeds for mankind.*

Psalm 100:4-5 Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise; give thanks to Him and praise His name. for the Lord is good and His love endures forever; His faithfulness continues through all generations.

So why should we give thanks? Because God is a good God, a loving God, a faithful God, and a God who has done wonderful deeds – this is just a small sampling of scripture that informs us.

C. It is modelled for us.

A thankful, grateful heart is modelled for us and particularly, because oftentimes, it is easy for us to be thankful when everything is going well. The problem arises when the situation is dark and maybe a little gloomy and not going the way we wanted. Then to be thankful is difficult, as we saw in the beginning when we looked at it and said: What's the point in being thankful in this kind of a situation that I'm in.

But as we look at the situation being modelled for us, we must look at Paul. Paul is in chains. He is a prisoner. And then he writes in Ephesians 5:20 *And give thanks for everything to God the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Give thanks for everything.* He wasn't saying to give thanks only for the good things. Out of a man who is in stocks, he says to give thanks for everything. Give thanks in every situation that you are in, whether it is good or bad. And he modelled it for us. Because elsewhere in his letter to the church at Philippi, he says, "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice." Paul modelled it for us. And this is why we should be thankful.

Then I want to move on. In light of what I've shared, we ought to exchange this attitude of cynicism and hopelessness for an attitude of gratitude. That's a wonderful little phrase that has been coined some time back. We need to change our attitude from one of saying, "Hey, what's the use!" to saying, "Okay! Maybe I need to do a mental shift and get to a place of gratitude and have my whole attitude itself be changed." Move away from this scorn and this disdain and cynicism for thanksgiving and say: Well maybe there is a case. I'm a child of God and if the Word tells me that I ought to be thankful, then I'm going to be a grateful person. In other words, make a mental shift in our minds to be thankful for many other things in our lives that we have missed because we were focused on just the things that were going wrong.

What things have we missed being thankful for?

Here are a few things:

1) Material Possessions:

The things we have around us. I read this little paragraph that said, "We are the lucky ones. I mean, we are more fortunate. We are more blessed by God or we have more things than other people may have." And then it goes on to say that:

- You are luckier than over one billion people if you can read.
- If you woke up this morning with more health than illness, then you are luckier than the million who will not survive this week; and even luckier because you have a provincial health care card that guarantees that you will have health care in case of illness.
- If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the lowliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture or the pangs of starvation, then you are ahead of 500 million people in the world.
- If you can attend any meeting you want – political, social, religious – then you are luckier than three billion people in the world.
- If you have food in the refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof over your head and a place to sleep, then you are richer than 75% of this world.

- If you have money in the bank, in your wallet and spare change in your dish somewhere, then you are among the top 8% of this world's wealthy.
- If you can read a list like this, then you are incredibly blessed of God.

So why should we give thanks? Because of the blessings that we may have lost sight of and particularly the material blessings that have come our way.

2) **People in your life:**

Family, friends, colleagues, one who will stand with you in whatever you are going through. We saw in our study of Colossians how thankful Paul was for the people of Colossae and Philippi. He said, "I give thanks for you because I've heard of the things that you are doing." So we must be thankful for people around us, beloved, who are with us during our times of difficulty, who pray for us when we are in times of need and who stand by us when we are in difficult waters.

3) **For the difficult times:**

We give thanks even for the difficult times. Why? Because it is the crucible in which we are refined and character is formed. It is in the difficult times that our character is formed. It is in the touch times that the ingenuity is birthed and patience is learned. We become innovative and creative during difficult times and it is through suffering that we are being made perfect just as Jesus was. So we give thanks even for the difficult times we are in.

4) **The gift of salvation:**

We give thanks for the gift of salvation. The bible says, "But the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Then, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that you and I who have believed in Him now have eternal life." So we can be thankful for the gift of salvation, in fact, the most beautiful gift that has ever been given to us – a gift that has taken us from this world and ensured us of a life in the world to come, a gift that helps us to meet every day with a sense of confidence in the fact that God is with us every moment every step of the way.

5) **The indwelling of His Holy Spirit:**

We can be thankful for the indwelling of His Holy Spirit. At our Wednesday Bible study, I had invited anyone who hadn't yet met the Lord Jesus Christ to invite Him into their hearts, because when that happens, the Holy Spirit takes residence in our hearts. What does the Holy Spirit do?

- He anoints us
- He baptizes us
- He guides us
- He empowers us
- He sanctifies us
- He bears witness to us
- He comforts us
- He gives us discernment
- He bears fruit
- He gives us gifts

All of these things that the Holy Spirit dwelling within us does for each one of us – and how can we not be thankful?

So what can we be thankful for? The material things, for the people in our lives, difficult times, the gift of salvation and the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit. So, with all the above, we are now moving away from a place of futility, moving away from a place of ingratitude to a place of gratitude. But

there's one more step that we need to take today, and it's captured for us in this particular song called "Give Thanks." Just a short chorus written many, many years ago, but it captures something that we need to do.

Give thanks with a grateful heart,
Give thanks to the Holy One,
Give thanks because He's given Jesus Christ, His Son.
And now, let the weak say, "I am strong,"
Let the poor say, "I am rich,"
Because of what the Lord has done for us,
Give thanks.

One important word beyond thanks repeated four times in this short chorus is the word "Give". It's a verb, the action word, and the action must follow the attitude of our mind or else it will just end up being something that we hold in our minds and say, "Okay, I'm going to have this attitude," but don't do anything about it. And the song reminds us that before thanks, we need to put the action in "give thanks".

And so, I want to invite you to take on not only the attitude of gratitude, but as we close this morning, to also be able to turn to the Lord and say, "Lord, I want to thank You. I've taken on this attitude of gratitude, but Lord, I want to now speak words of thanks to You." What kind of thanks can we give to Him? I'm going to give you three areas that we can thank Him for. We can do it as we end, and I want you to keep them in mind through this day and this week and this month, as we head into thanksgiving time, before we reach Advent and Christmas.

Just that we continue to be a thankful people, so let's thank Him for:

1) His provision during lean times

How much He has given us. He is our provider, Jehovah Jireh, the God who provides. As the songwriter says:

"Every need He is supplying
Plenteous grace He bestows
Every day my way grows brighter
The longer I serve Him, the sweeter He grows."

God continues to provide for us. Remember the manna in the wilderness. Remember the widow for whom the oil did not stop until she ran out of vessels. Remember Elijah, after his flight from Carmel, sitting there alone, famished; and an angel comes and gives him bread to eat. And then Paul reminds us in the Word: "And my God will supply all your needs according to the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus." God continues to be our Provider, and we must thank Him for that.

2) His peace during troubled times,

Look at the many reminders in scripture that tell us about God's peace resting upon us. It says, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee." (Isaiah 26:3) Our minds stay on Him and God's peace stays upon us. Why? Because we trust in Him.

John 14:27 My peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. Jesus saying this before He left the earth.

Philippians 4:7 *“And the peace which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus,”* says Paul.

And so we thank Him for His peace in troubled times.

3) **His pleasure during all times.**

His pleasure upon us. Look at these scriptures:

Jeremiah 31:3 *“I have loved you with an everlasting love.”* God says this beloved, to you and to me. I have loved you with an everlasting love.

Zephaniah 3:17 *“The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty One who will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness; He will quiet you by His love; He will exult over you with loud singing.”*

Psalms 149:4 *“For the Lord takes pleasure in His people; He adorns the humble with salvation.”*

Psalms 18:19 *“He brought me out into a broad place; He rescued me, because He delighted in me.”* He delighted in me.

Look at these words, beloved. Rejoices over you, pleasure in His people, delights in you. God’s pleasure rests upon us all the time. So as we lift our hearts to Him, let us thank Him for His provision, His peace and His pleasure over us.

Thanksgiving time, church. This is it! This is our time to just pause and say, “Lord, amidst all that is going on in my life, I recognize that I have and need to be thankful. Beyond that, I need to say to you Lord, I’m so thankful for Your continued care for me. So thankful for the peace You give me, so thankful for the pleasure that You take in me among many, many other things that God bestows upon us. So it’s a time beloved, to turn our gaze to the King of kings, and the Lord of lords, and say:

Thanks, thanks, we give you thanks for all You’ve done.
