



DEVELOPING THE FUTURE

Sermon

Part 2 – Let Us Give Thanks . . .

2015 Thank Offering for the World Evangelism Fund

“Future generations will hear about the wonders of the Lord.” Psalm 22:30b, NLT

“so future generations will hear about the wonders of the Lord” Psalm 22:30b, NLT

Psalm 100

A psalm. For giving grateful praise.

- ¹ Shout with joy to the LORD, all the earth!
- ² Worship the LORD with gladness.
Come before him, singing with joy.
- ³ Acknowledge that the LORD is God!
He made us, and we are his.
We are his people, the sheep of his pasture.
- ⁴ Enter his gates with thanksgiving;
go into his courts with praise.
Give thanks to him and praise his name.
- ⁵ For the LORD is good.
His unfailing love continues forever;
and his faithfulness continues to each generation.

For most worshippers of the Lord in the Old Testament periods, going to church involved a long, dusty walk filled with expectation and excitement. The journey was all about expressing to the Lord gratitude for His faithfulness and provision. They gave thanks because the Lord’s goodness was permanent; His love endures forever, through all generations.

So what are you thankful for today? I’m thankful that I have this opportunity to preach. It is my calling and purpose and I am grateful to be a part of the process of spreading God’s Word.

I’m thankful for much more than just that...

- I’m thankful that God’s love never fails
- I’m thankful that the Lord loves me even when I fail
- I’m thankful that my cell phone can turn off
- I’m thankful that bumper stickers are out of style
- I’m thankful that hugs and kisses from my spouse and children don’t add weight or raise my cholesterol (many things that I enjoy do!)
- And I’m thankful for you

When the Israelites were thankful, they did several of the same things we do. They read God’s Word, sang songs of praise, gave offerings, and celebrated. But in addition to that, they often recited their spiritual history. I suppose we would call that a testimony. They recited the history of how God delivered them from Egypt, cared for them, provided for them, and demonstrated the faithfulness of His love for them.

God has certainly given us lots of things to be thankful for. Notice that in this Psalm of Thanksgiving, we find the focus is not on the things that God had provided, but the focus is on God. As the procession passes through the gates of the temple, they are called to give thanks to

God. In praising God they are not denying that there are problems and pain in the world. They probably had tired legs and sore feet from the walk. Like us, they were well acquainted with disappointment, death, loss, pain and suffering. By focusing their attention on God and all His greatness, they were inspired, lifted up, and thankful.

So, let's be thankful for:

1. Your pilgrimage or your testimony

Everybody has a story. And in everyone's story is a measure of grace that has been extended by the Lord himself.

One story in the Old Testament that stands out is the story of Job. You probably remember Job by the hardships that came upon him, but in the end, we see that God extends a measure of grace to Job.

Before his trials, he was the richest man in his area, with 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 teams of oxen, and many servants. The Bible says he was "blameless—a man of complete integrity" (Job 1:1).

And then, Job lost all he had—not just his flocks, but his family as well. He grieved, saying, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21, KJV). Job remembered God's grace and provision even in the midst of great loss.

Next, Job was struck with boils over his whole body. His wife told him to "curse God and die" (Job 2:8). But Job told replied, "Should we accept only good things from the hand of God and never anything bad?" Although Job had nothing left—not even his health—God had a plan for his life.

Although our hero has a strong faith, his strength wanes. He begins to question God, cursing the day of his birth. Job and his friends grapple with the circumstances of his life over the next twenty-five chapters of the Bible. Then the Lord comes into the scene again with a thundering voice. He powerfully reminds them of His authority. At once, Job replies, "I know that you can do anything . . . I take back everything I said, and I sit in dust and ashes to show my repentance" (Job 42:2a and 42:6). The book concludes with God blessing Job once again, giving him twice the wealth that he had before. God also gave him seven more sons and three more daughters.

We've come a long way through the story of Job to see that God extended grace to His servant, in the midst of both blessing and suffering. The Lord never withdrew His hand from Job, even when Job questioned him. Job experienced God's grace throughout his life. We too should be thankful in the midst of our circumstances, whether things seem to be going well or not.

2. Next, we can be thankful for God's hand in our community—our family, friends, church, and relationships.

Most of us, if we look back very far in our history, will find that we are surrounded by strong people who have been given support, direction and love.

The apostle Paul starts his letter to the Philippians by telling them how much he appreciates their fellowship, saying “Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy” (Philippians 1:3).

Think of people about whom you can say the same thing. I hope you have people who have supported you in your Christian walk that you can be thankful for.

3. We can also be thankful that life doesn’t have to be easy.

I’m glad to have a home, bed and food. But along with all the comforts, maybe we should be grateful that life is sometimes not so easy. Some of the hardest tasks in life produce the highest sense of accomplishment. We tend to cherish most the things that we have worked to own.

I once pastored a young church, only a few years old, which had matured enough to build and enjoy its first sanctuary. It was small, but pretty and conducive to worship. The path toward the new facility wasn’t easy. It involved sacrifice and some unique experiences. One of the earliest worship facilities was in a rented hall that regularly held community games on Saturday nights. In order to worship on Sunday morning, several members had to commit to arriving early on Sunday morning to sweep floors, clean up messes, pick up the trash and straighten up the furniture. Once the new facility was built, one would think that the attitude would have been “Those days back at the community center were awful.” The attitude was exactly opposite, sort of like, “Remember those good old days when there was just few of us, and we all had to pick up trash on Sunday mornings? Those were blessed days!”

We are never thankful for bad things, but we can be certain that gratefulness to the Lord will make bad things turn out better.

4. For Jesus

Of all we have to be thankful for, Jesus is at the top of the list. We give thanks for the One who intercedes for us, for the One who suffered and died for us, for the One who opened the door to heaven for all sinners. By His blood we are purified, saved, sanctified, and made holy. Blessed be His name! I invite you to talk to me after the service if you don’t know what it means to have a relationship with Him.

5. For the future

All of our gratitude can lead to thankfulness that God will lead us in the future. We’re thankful, whether we’re talking about our own future, or the future of those younger than us. We must be witnesses, so that “future generations will hear about the wonders of the Lord” (Psalm 22:30b). As one Christian artist sings, “We must be a light for future generations.”¹

¹ 4Him, “For Future Generations”, 1994, INO Records

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One way that we develop the future is to give to the World Evangelism Fund. What a worthy contribution to make, a gift to ensure that the work of the church goes on across the globe, reaching both current and future generations for Christ. We give out of our plenty, as we have been blessed to be a blessing to others.

Conclusion

Yes, we have much to be thankful for. But does “thankfulness” have an opposite? Well of course “thanklessness,” but that’s just too easy. How about unthankful, ungrateful, unappreciative? That’s an ugly set of words and are not a good fit for God’s people. We are to be thankful in both easy and difficult circumstances, so that “God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns” (Philippians 1:6).