

Thanksgiving

Luke 17:11-19

INTRODUCTION:

ILLUSTRATION:

A man had been lost and walking in the desert for about five days. One hot day--actually, they're all hot--he comes to the home of a preacher. Tired and weak, he crawls up to the house and collapses on the doorstep. The preacher takes him in and nurses him back to health. Feeling better, the man asks the preacher for directions to the nearest town. The preacher tells him the directions, and offers to lend him his horse to ride there. The preacher says, "However, there is a special thing you need to know about this horse. You have to say **"Thank God"** to make it **go** and **"Amen"** to make it **stop**."

Anxious to get to town, the man says, "Sure, okay" and gets on the horse. He says, **"Thank God"** and sho 'nuff, the horse starts walking. Then to check out the horse's ability to understand and obey commands, he says **"Amen"** and the horse stopped in its tracks. A bit later he says louder, **"Thank God, thank God,"** and the horse starts trotting. Feeling really brave, the man says, **"Thank God! Thank God! THANK GOD!"** and the horse is soon up to a full gallop!

About then he realizes he's heading for a huge cliff and yells "Whoa!" But the horse doesn't even slow! It's coming up REAL QUICK and he's doing everything he can to make the horse stop. "Whoa, stop, hold on!" Finally he remembers **"AMEN!!!"**

The horse stops a mere two inches from the cliff's edge, almost throwing him over its head. The man, panting and heart racing, wipes the sweat from his face and leans back in the saddle...and then says as he is gasping for air, **"Thank God."**

Are you thankful no matter what? Perhaps you or a loved one have lost their health, or suffered a great loss, or are being treated improperly, or has died. Or maybe it was saying the **right** thing at what may, at the time, seem to be the wrong time. **Such as saying "Thank God" to God when you are on the preachers horse that is standing right in front of a cliff!** At times we may be forced to stand up for God even when it may sever a friendship or even bring physical harm or ourselves.

These events in our life can be difficult to understand. But we MUST remember that God does things by His will and we may never know exactly why that event had to occur in our lives. We must all remember that God causes all things to **work together for good** to those who love Him.

And because of these promises, we must remember to continuously recognize God's blessings in our lives and THANK Him for them!

All Stand and Read Scripture

Luke 17:11-19 (NASB)

¹¹ While He was on the way to Jerusalem, He was passing between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As He entered a village, ten leprous men who stood at a distance met Him; ¹³ and they raised their voices, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” ¹⁴ When He saw them, He said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they were going, they were cleansed. ¹⁵ Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, ¹⁶ and he fell on his face at His feet, giving **thanks** to Him. And he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Then Jesus answered and said, “Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine—where are they? ¹⁸ Was no one found who returned to give glory to God, except this foreigner?” ¹⁹ And He said to him, “Stand up and go; your faith has made you well.”

As we prepare to consider our passage this morning, let's bow in a word of prayer.

Prayer

In the ancient world, leprosy was a terrible disease. It hopelessly disfigured those who had it, and it permanently cut them off from normal society. Without exception, every leper yearned for one thing: To be healed.

In our passage this morning ten lepers approached Jesus outside a village, loudly pleading with Him to heal them. In an instant He restored them all to perfect health—but only one came back and thanked Him. All the rest left without a word of thanks, their minds preoccupied only with themselves, gripped with a spirit of ingratitude.

Today, too, ingratitude and thanklessness are far too common. Children forget to thank their parents for all that they do. Common courtesy is scorned. We take for granted the ways that others help us. Above all, we fail to thank God for His blessings.

We all have much to be thankful for. This morning I would like to look at how the Bible defines the gratitude that is expected from a Christian.

BODY:

I. Understanding God's Will and Righteousness.

As I was preparing this message, I noticed one common theme in the scriptures that will invoke our thankfulness to God. That theme was the righteousness of God and the fact that He does everything based upon His perfect will.

Remember what Jesus said:

Matthew 6:33 (NASB)

³³ But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

God's righteousness is absolute moral perfection. His righteousness has the absence of all sin. Since God is perfect in all of His attributes, God's righteousness is perfect, eternal, unchangeable, and absolute.

It is by this divine righteousness of absolute moral perfection and sinlessness by which God judges all of His created beings.

Romans 3:21-24 (NASB)

²¹ But now apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²² even *the* righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;

All men without exception have sinned and come short of the glory of God and have been separated from His righteousness.

Romans 6:22-23 (NASB)

²² But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

All men are worthy of death because the “wages of sin is death”.

God is just in condemning the unrighteous. But God is also just in saving sinners.

Justice was done on the cross of Calvary. God did not reduce the charges against men; He did not change the standard of righteousness. God poured out the full measure of His righteous wrath upon His Son on the cross of Calvary. In Him, justice was meted out. All of those who trust in Him by faith are justified. Their sins are forgiven because Jesus paid the full price; He suffered the full measure of God’s wrath in their place. And for those who reject the goodness and mercy of God at Calvary, they must pay the penalty for their sins because they would not accept the payment Jesus made in their place.

II. THANK GOD FOR HIS BLESSINGS.

Luke 12:27-32 (NASB)

²⁷ Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; but I tell you, not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. ²⁸ But if God so clothes the grass in the field, which is *alive* today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, how much more *will He clothe* you? You men of little faith! ²⁹ And do not seek what you will eat and what you will drink, and do not keep worrying. ³⁰ For all these things the nations of the world eagerly seek; but your Father knows that you need these things. ³¹ But seek His kingdom, and these things will be added to you. ³² Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom.

We seem **never** to be satisfied with what we have—rich or poor, healthy or sick. But what a difference it makes when we realize that everything we have has been given to us by God!

Philippians 4:11b-13 (NASB)

¹¹...I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. ¹² I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. ¹³ I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

Are you constantly preoccupied with what you do **not** have? Or have you learned that God will provide your true needs and He will strengthen you to appreciate all that you receive from Him. Once we experience God's generosity in our lives and the strength that He provides for us, it becomes second nature to continually thank Him for His blessings.

One of the most distinctive marks of the believer in Jesus Christ is Thanksgiving—the giving of thanks—to God for all His blessings. We must **not** allow a spirit of **ingratitude** to harden our heart and chill our relationship with God and with others.

Ingratitude is a sin, just as surely as is **lying** or **stealing** or **immorality** or any other sin condemned by the Bible. The Holy Spirit revealed through Paul in the first chapter of Romans that the existence of God and His righteousness has been revealed to all men. When they choose to ignore the evidence and not give thanks to God, they are without excuse for their ungodliness.

Thankfulness is the natural out flowing of a heart that is attuned to God.

Paul told the Thessalonian Christians...

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NASB)

¹⁶ Rejoice always; ¹⁷ pray without ceasing; ¹⁸ in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Thanksgiving for the Apostle Paul was not a once-a-year celebration, but a daily reality that changed his life and made him a joyful person in every situation.

You may think, surely Paul made a mistake or even that this was easy for him to say. But it wasn't. Paul suffered from a very difficult problem that he called a "thorn in the flesh". He also had been run out of town, beaten, whipped, imprisoned, betrayed by friends, naked, cold, hungry shipwrecked, stoned, and left for dead because of his faith. Yet, Paul never stopped giving thanks.

When we are in the midst of trials we can also can thank God, because we know that He has promised to be with us and that He will help us. We know that He can use times of suffering to draw us closer to Himself.

James 1:2-3 (NASB)

² Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

Paul could have had a real pity party for himself many times. One example was his imprisonment. He was an apostle who had been commanded to spread the Gospel to the world, and instead, he was sitting in prison. Instead of questioning God on why He would allow this to happen when there are so many souls to win, he found the positive. When we like Paul have the proper perspective we to can give thanks in all circumstances.

God allows things to happen in our lives that may not make sense to us. It probably did not make sense to Paul why God would allow him to be in prison. But because of his imprisonment, we have the New Testament books today that was written by Paul during that imprisonment. Trust that the things that happen to you are by God's will. You may never know why they happen, but you can believe that God will use it for His good and give Him THANKS!

Finally, I would like to consider God's greatest Gift of all—His Son, who died on the cross and rose again so that we can know Him personally and spend eternity with Him in heaven."

III. THANK GOD FOR HIS SALVATION IN JESUS CHRIST.

Many of you may remember Paul Harvey who had a radio news broadcast. He would generally end his broadcast with what he called "The Rest of the Story". I had the privilege of meeting Paul Harvey in person at the Kiamichi Men's Clinic in the Kiamichi mountains of eastern Oklahoma back in the early 70's. Following is one of his broadcasts entitled "The Old Man and the Gulls" that aired in 1977.

ILLUSTRATION:

It is **gratitude** that prompted an old man to visit an old broken pier on the eastern seacoast of Florida. Every Friday night, until his death in 1973, he would return, walking slowly and slightly stooped with a large bucket of shrimp. The sea gulls would flock to this old man, and he would feed them from his bucket.

Many years before, in October, 1942, Captain Eddie Rickenbacker was on a mission in a B-17 to deliver an important message to General Douglas MacArthur in New Guinea. But there was an unexpected detour which would hurl Captain Eddie into the most harrowing adventure of his life.

Somewhere over the South Pacific the Flying Fortress became lost beyond the reach of radio. Fuel ran dangerously low, so the men ditched their plane in the ocean. For nearly a month Captain Eddie and his companions would fight the water, and the weather, and the scorching sun. They spent many sleepless nights recoiling as giant sharks rammed their rafts. The largest raft was nine by five. The biggest shark...ten feet long.

But of all their enemies at sea, one proved most formidable: starvation. Eight days out, their rations were long gone or destroyed by the salt water. It would take a miracle to sustain them. And a miracle occurred. In Captain Eddie's own words, "Cherry," that was the B-17 pilot, Captain William Cherry, "read the service that afternoon, and we finished with a prayer for deliverance and a hymn of praise. There was some talk, but it tapered off in the oppressive heat. With my hat pulled down over my eyes to keep out some of the glare, I dozed off."

And then suddenly, "Something landed on my head. I knew that it was a seagull. I don't know how I knew, I just knew. Everyone else knew too. No one said a word, but peering out from under my hat brim without moving my head, I could see the expression on their faces. They were staring at that gull. The gull meant food...if I could catch it."

And the rest, as they say, is history. Captain Eddie caught the gull. Its flesh was eaten. Its intestines were used for bait to catch fish. The survivors were sustained and their hopes renewed because a lone sea gull, uncharacteristically hundreds of miles from land, offered itself as a sacrifice. You know that Captain Eddie survived!

And now you also know...that he never forgot. Because every Friday evening, about sunset...on a lonely stretch along the eastern Florida seacoast...you could see an old man walking...white-haired, bushy-eye browed, slightly bent. His bucket filled with shrimp so he could feed the seagulls...to remember that one which, on a day long past, gave itself without a struggle...so he could be saved.

And now you know the rest of the story...

God has given us the greatest Gift of all—His Son, who died on the cross and rose again so that we can know Him personally and spend eternity with Him in heaven:

2 Corinthians 9:15 (NASB)

¹⁵ Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

This is the "Good News" of the Gospel of Christ.

GOSPEL: (God's Only Son Provides Eternal Life).

John 3:16 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

We are never PUNISHED for our sins as Christians, because our sins are covered by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ when we repent of our sins. Christ took the punishment for us and restored our righteousness so we could be found blameless before God despite our sins. There is no debt to pay!

We do not have any GOOD to give back to God other than the GOOD that He has already given to us through His Holy Spirit. The Gospel is the good news that Jesus came to die for our sins, that sin exists - our personal sin - and it has caused a great chasm between us and God. A chasm that neither you nor I could cross ourselves. So, God sent Jesus to die for those sins, because the wages of sin is death. He removed the punishment that we deserve, rose again, and now we have hope and joy in this life. That is the good news of Jesus Christ.

That means that the Gospel changes things. It changes things about the way we live and what we believe. It changes our identity.

So, no longer is my identity rooted in how other people see me, or what they think about me, or how they feel about me.

The Gospel should also change the way that we do things, the way that we live. The cross exists because you and I couldn't do it on our own. That is the reason why Jesus came to die for us, because we couldn't pull ourselves out of the pit of sin. So we needed to be saved.

CONCLUSION:

In many countries a special day is set aside each year for thanksgiving. But for the Christian every day can be a day of thanksgiving.

The optimist says, the cup is half full. The pessimist says, the cup is half empty. The child of God says; My cup runneth over.

John 10:27-28 (NASB)

²⁷ My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; ²⁸ and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.

What a promise to be thankful for! Are you a sheep or a goat? God already knows! But the choice is yours.

"My sheep hear my voice... and they follow me". Jesus is pleading with those who have not accepted His free gift of salvation to repent and be baptized for the remission of your sins while your opportunity is still available.

And if you do know Christ, how long has it been since you thanked God for your salvation? We should not let a day go by without thanking God for His mercy and His grace to us in Jesus Christ.

Family of God.