

For Granted or Gratitude

(A message of Thanksgiving to all Believers)

“Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!” (2 Corinthians 9:15)

Introduction:

It is so easy to take things for granted.

- Friends
- Family
- Things we have
- Good Health

We live in a wonderful, free country. All you have to do is leave this country for a while and realize this

We are well fed. Most of us are!

We have a roof over our heads and money in our pockets.

It's true, we might not be as well off as some, but **compared to most of the world we are rich.**

We are not only blessed materially, we are blessed with **friends, family, and a future.**

But, in spite of all this, we are sometimes slow to acknowledge our blessings.

It's for this reason I want to stop church business tonight and share my blessings with you.

Because we have grown so accustomed to our blessings, we sometimes take them for granted.

It's so easy to do. All of us need to dwell on this for a little while. Think about it.

Occasionally we need to be reminded of just what we have been taking for granted, and what we have to be thankful for.

- I'm thankful for my health.
- I'm a cancer survivor of almost eight years.
- God has protected me in so many different ways.

It's at special times, like Thanksgiving, that we are able to focus our attention on the things which really count.

During on special weekend away, I again was reminded how very special my wife, Drusilla is to me and how thankful I am for God sending her to me.

I was reminded of how special you as a church board are to both of us.

I was reminded of how special our church family is.

This American holiday of Thanksgiving which is in 8 days is a special time of the year.

It is a time when we look back on the blessings God has given us, and a time **when we look forward to the blessings we will enjoy forever in eternity.**

Additionally, we can focus in on the present and celebrate the greatest gift of all, the gift of God's Son, Jesus Christ.

- ***"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits"*** (Psalm 103:2).
- Because God's goodness is as constant as the sun, we are in danger of forgetting what He showers on us each day.
- If we count our blessings one by one, we will never get finished.
- I wish we all could list ten gifts God has given us throughout the year and watch something happen to your hearts.

So the hymn writer articulates the goodness of the Lord as: **"For all Thy gifts, we bless Thee Lord. But chiefly for our heavenly food. Thy pardoning grace, Thy quickening word. These prompt our son, that God is good"**

But Thanksgiving, the day, reminds us of thanksgiving, the Attitude.

What we need to cultivate is an Attitude of Gratitude.

The reason is simple.

We live in a day of ingratitude.

Aristotle recognized this when he said, **"What soon grows old? And his answer: Gratitude."**

The Bible describes the Last Days in this way: ***"For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God"***
(2 Timothy 3:2-4).

One of the characteristics mentioned in this litany of bad character is that of being **"ungrateful." This characterizes our day.**

But why are there so many complainers?

I heard of a recent medical survey which states that chronic complainers live longer than people who are always sweet and serene.

It claims that their cantankerous spirit gives them a purpose for living.

Each morning they get up with a fresh challenge to see how many things they can find to grumble about, and they derive great satisfaction from making others miserable.

Do you suppose that this is true?

I doubt it. It seems to me that it is questionable whether those who complain actually do outlive those who don't. I simply don't believe this!

Maybe it just seems that way to everybody around them.

None of us like to be around complainers. Do we?

Therefore, none of us should want to be a complainer.

Samuel Johnson said, "**Gratitude is a fruit of great cultivation; you do not find it among gross people.**"

One thing that I do not want to be is gross, and you shouldn't want to be gross either.

In fact, all people ought to be thankful.

And of all who ought to be thankful, those who know Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Lord ought to be especially thankful.

1. The Basis

What is the basis for true thanksgiving?

Well, to be thankful, one must be grateful for something, and to someone.

Mary Ann Vincent said, "**The atheist's most embarrassing moment is when he feels profoundly thankful for something, but can't think of anybody to thank for it.**"

The real basis for giving thanks is found in a Person.

The early Pilgrims who came to America had many difficult days in settling this new land that we live in now.

Governor Bradford of Massachusetts made this first Thanksgiving proclamation three years after the Pilgrims settled at Plymouth:

"Inasmuch as the Great Father has given us this year an abundant harvest of Indian corn, wheat, peas, beans, squashes, and garden vegetables, and has made the forest to abound with game and the sea with fish and clams, and inasmuch as He has protected us from the ravages of the savages,

has spared us from pestilence and disease, has granted us freedom to worship God according to the dictates of our own conscience. Now I, your magistrate, do proclaim that all ye Pilgrims, with your wives and ye little ones, do gather at ye meeting house, on ye hill, between the hours of nine and twelve in the daytime, on Thursday, November 29th, in the year of our Lord One Thousand Six Hundred and Twenty-Three, and the third year since ye Pilgrims landed on ye Pilgrim Rock, there to listen to ye pastor and render thanksgiving to ye Almighty God for all His blessings."

William Bradford
Ye Governor of Ye Colony

Those early Pilgrims recognized that the provisions they had experienced came from God.

They were thankful, and they did not hide the fact that they were thankful to Almighty God.

But the greatest gift ever given, by the greatest Person, was God's Son, Jesus.

He's the real basis for all thanksgiving.

2 Corinthians 9:15 says, *"Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift! The greatest gift that anyone has ever given to humankind is the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ."*

God sent Jesus, because He loved us, to do the greatest work for us that anyone has ever done.

That work was dying on the Cross for our sins, so that we could be set free. Jesus paid the penalty for all your sins.

He died so that you would not have to die.

He suffered so that the bondage of sin could be broken.

He took your place on the Cross.

He died for you.

And He did it all because He loves you.

God responded to the greatest need, our sin, by giving the greatest Person, Jesus Christ, to make the greatest sacrifice, His death, in order to give us the greatest gift, eternal life. God gave Jesus.

Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

This is what is called the Gospel. Gospel means Good News.

And it is Good News indeed!

Those of us who have experienced the effects of this Good News in our lives also know the gratitude we feel toward God.

How can we ever thank Him enough?

Surely human words fail to adequately express the overwhelming gratitude which wells up in our hearts.

On the other hand, those who do not know Jesus Christ may not feel that gratitude.

They may see the world as a dark place, full of foreboding and despair. E. J. Conrad has said, "**One distinguishing mark of an unregenerate man is ingratitude.**"

Unless we have been touched by God, we probably will never be truly grateful for anything.

The basis for true thanksgiving is an encounter with the living God.

As we get to know Jesus better, we will find that our gratitude grows.

He alone can give us an attitude of gratitude.

2. **The Benefits**

There are over 550 references to thankfulness in the Bible.

With such an emphasis on thanksgiving, there must be great benefits as well.

Consider the benefits of cultivating this attitude of gratitude.

There are many benefits.

Perhaps the greatest is that thanksgiving has a powerful effect on our lives.

It changes us. **Thanksgiving makes us different.**

We have already made the point that we live in an ungrateful age.

Look around you.

Daily you will see people who are bitter.

It is said that "**some people are bitter, not because they do not have anything, but because they do not have everything.**"

We have been well taught to be greedy and grasping.

We are bombarded by commercials which remind us of what we do not have.

Christmas becomes a depressing time for many. Have you ever wondered why that is?

We are led to believe that if we do not have things we will not experience happiness. And so we are unhappy people.

Most unhappy people are unthankful people.

At first glance, you may think them unthankful because they are unhappy.

That is not true. In fact, the opposite is true. This might sound like a play on words, but listen:

They are not unthankful because they are unhappy, but they are unhappy because they are unthankful.

Thanksgiving has the power to transform us into different people.

We will not only be different from the people around us, we will also be different from the way we used to be.

We will be transformed.

We will be transformed in our thinking and in our temperament.

As we seek to cultivate this attitude of gratitude, **our thinking will be transformed.**

It will be transformed because we will begin to program our minds to think in a different way.

The way of the world is to concentrate on the negative.

Our tendency is to correct and to point out errors.

But the way of Christ is to emphasize the positive.

We are to look for the good in everything, and just as we can find the negative when we look for it, so we can find the positive when we look for it.

Listen to an example of this kind of thinking found in Philippians 4:8: *"Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things."*

As we begin to refocus our attention on the things which are good, our minds will be renewed.

They will be transformed.

And there is always a positive side even to negative things.

For instance, we can be thankful even for husbands who attack small repair jobs around the house.

They usually make them big enough to call in professionals, anyway that has happened to me more than I can count!

We can be thankful for children who put away their things and clean up after themselves.

We can be thankful for smoke alarms. They tell us when the turkey's done.

There is always a positive side. As we choose to think on it, our minds will be transformed.

Not only will we experience transformed thinking, but **we will experience transformed temperaments.**

We read in Colossians 3:15-17, *"And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body, and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell in you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father."*

In each of these verses we find that giving thanks is mentioned.

It is mentioned because it is essential to a temperament which reflects the presence of Christ and His Word.

Thanksgiving should be as natural to the Christian as swimming is to the fish.

We both do it because we are alive. And it becomes a way of life.

There are many times when we could choose to look on the negative.

Matthew Henry, the famous scholar, had such an occasion. He was once accosted by thieves and robbed of his purse. He wrote these words in his diary:

"Let me be thankful first, because I was never robbed before; second, because, although they took my purse, they did not take my life; third, because, although they took my all, it was not much; and fourth, because it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed."

This is evidence of a man who had a transformed temperament and transformed thinking.

His life had been changed by choosing to be thankful.

This choice will enable all of us to move forward in many other areas.

As Cicero said, **"A thankful heart is not only the greatest virtue, but the parent of all other virtues."**

There are so many reasons to be thankful.

We can be thankful for the gift of eternal life through Christ; for the promises of God, which are all yes in Christ; for the blessings of life which God gives us; for what thanksgiving does for us inwardly, replacing hatred, bitterness, unforgiveness, and envy; and for what thanksgiving does for us outwardly, making us a pleasure to be around.

But while there are many reasons to be thankful, perhaps there is one reason which rises above them all.

Thanksgiving is really the only thing we have to give to God.

When you think of it, all the other material things are things we have been given.

But giving thanks is ours. It is uniquely ours.

It is something we choose to do. It is an offering of praise to God.

It is something that gladdens His heart.

We should learn how to express our thanksgiving well, not only to God, but to one another.

We're sometimes too much like a little boy I heard about. On his return from a birthday party, his mother asked, "**Bobby, did you thank the lady for the party?**"

Bobby replied, "Well, I was going to. But a girl ahead of me said, 'Thank you,' and the lady told her not to mention it. So I didn't."

What kinds of attitudes characterize you?

You can either take things for granted or take them with gratitude.

Let's remember to "*give thanks with a grateful heart.*"

Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!