

Message on Gratitude

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(All scripture passages are taken from the NIV translation.)

Readings

Luke 17

11* Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus travelled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. 12* As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance 13* and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" 14* When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed. 15* One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. 16* He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him--and he was a Samaritan. 17* Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? 18* Was no-one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" 19* Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

Luke 7

36* Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. 37* When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, 38* and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. 39* When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is--that she is a sinner." 40* Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, teacher," he said. 41* "Two men owed money to a certain money-lender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42* Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he cancelled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" 43* Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt cancelled." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said. 44* Then he turned towards the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45* You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. 46* You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. 47*

Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven-- for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little." 48* Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." 49* The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" 50* Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Colossians 3

12* Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13* Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14* And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. 15* Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16* Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. 17* And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Message

Gratitude

Thankfulness: appreciation of kindness.

Thankful

1. pleased and relieved. 2. Expressing gratitude.

(Concise Oxford English Dictionary, tenth edition)

Being thankful is a Christian trait.

Because we believe God has shown us immense kindness, by loving us, atoning for our sin, and adopting us as children, with all the promises of security in this world, and joy in the next, we respond with thankfulness. When the love of God breaks into our minds and hearts with understanding and faith, major changes take place within us, and we respond with thanks. Our gratitude takes many forms. It includes tears, songs, inner joy, and self-giving. Our voices lose their self-consciousness, and hymns of praise leap out. Also our prayers are filled with thanksgiving. Our eyes see, sometimes for the first time, the amazing generous giving of our Father, in the creation around us, our family, friends and work colleagues, and the events and circumstances of our lives. Everything becomes a gift to give thanks for, even the painful things.

The scriptures repeatedly encourage us to give thanks:

Ps 107:1* **Give thanks** to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures for ever.

Php 4:4* **Rejoice** in the Lord always. I will say it again: **Rejoice!**

Heb 12:28* Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be **thankful**, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe,

1Th 5:18* **give thanks** in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Col 3:15* Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

So it is no coincidence that our churches are full of the language of praise and thanksgiving. There are many, many, many songs written to give thanks. There are prayers and offerings, there are services, there is artwork and architecture, dance and all manner of ways in which the people of God give thanks to God. And all of it is appropriate and deserved.

As a society, we also encourage thankfulness. Maybe this is because of our Christian heritage. Evidence of this is found in what we believe to be proper interaction between people. We teach/instil in our children the practice of thanking, sometimes painfully. Polite interaction requires a word of gratitude at the completion of an interaction, such as when you buy a cup of coffee, no matter how bad it tastes!

In an ideal world, every person to person contact would involve mutual thanks; work would be performed as a gift, and wages given as a gift. Such an ideal world would be full of gratitude.

Our society today often runs in "auto".

For example if you ring up say, the medical centre, or a government department during normal working hours, the first person to answer the phone is usually not a person. It is a recording directing you to press certain buttons to get to the next step, or even worse, a computer trying to analyse your voice responses. I think I was going to be given the phone number to a hotel in St George with a name that sound like "no" the other day, because my answer to one of the computerized questions was "no".

Now there is nothing morally wrong with recorded messages, I am just making the point that our society likes to run in automatic mode. Why? I guess it's the computer age and I guess it speeds up the sorting out of various interactions, saving on employed working hours, saving businesses some expenses. Another example is online air-travel booking. We are encouraged now to do electronic check-in if we

only have hand luggage. No need to bother a check-in worker. No need to queue up... supposedly.

An effect of this sort of society is that there are less person to person interactions. We get used to doing things a certain way, without having to interact. When you catch a bus you no longer look at, or greet the bus driver. When you buy food, you go through the drive through. And so it goes on.

I imagine that some people are starved of human contact. They may make a point of buying a newspaper simply for the sake of making some human contact on a regular basis.

The other side of the coin is that those of us who are entrenched in our busy lifestyles, expect efficiency in the system, and may become frustrated by having to wait because of inefficiency. We become angry and ungrateful.

I don't think it's a coincidence that anger, impatience, and ingratitude, all seem to group together. Just as joy, peace and gratitude also seem to go together.

Gratitude toward God and toward each are also linked. Just as love towards God and man are linked. John says that if we don't love our brothers who we do see, then we don't love God who we don't see. Thankfulness I believe, is the same.

(1Jo 4:20* If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. 21* And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.)

This is a bit of a tangent, but as Christians we are sometimes guilty of taking other people and their gifts/kindness for granted, not bothering to thank them, taking the view that it is all from God, so that if we thank him, that is somehow enough. It is good to thank God, but it is also good to thank our neighbours when they have blessed us. Whether or not they be people of faith. Remember the Pharisees, who neutralized God's word by suggesting that their duties towards their parents somehow was absolved by their devotion to God.

Mark 7:10* For Moses said, 'Honour your father and your mother,' and, 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' 11* But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban' (that is, a gift devoted to God), 12* then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. 13* Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that."

Whatever our society is like, as Christians we need to be careful to remain grateful, giving thanks in all circumstances.

Ingratitude is serious, and a sign of fallen-ness.

Romans 1

18* The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness,

19* since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. 20* For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. 21* For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God **nor gave thanks to him**, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22* Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23* and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

Greed and envy are also related to ingratitude, though I won't enter into an explanation for this during this discussion.

It is better to remain thankful and fresh in our relationships.

Jesus was a man of gratitude.

When I was thinking about this, my first thought was about the miracle of the loaves and fishes. Here were five thousand people in the countryside who were eager to be taught by Jesus. The disciples wanted to send them away, but Jesus took responsibility for the situation, and looked for whatever resources he had at hand. It wasn't much, 5 loaves 2 fishes, and a willing child who would share this food.

What was Jesus' response?

If it were me, I might have responded with ingratitude and anger: Is this all we have? Why didn't someone think ahead?

I would have tried to shift the blame on to my wife, or someone else.

In contrast Jesus looks up to heaven and...

Mr 6:41 Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he **gave thanks** and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all.

How did this happen?

I can't explain. But God is able to do anything. And God blesses Jesus' gratitude. I wonder if that miracle would have occurred if Jesus had had an attitude of ingratitude and frustration at God's lack of provision at that point in time?

Would it be honest to say that when I am in a situation of poor resources, my own bad attitude makes the situation worse? My joy dissipates and my gratitude vanishes?

Would it be surprising to suggest that gratitude, especially in the face of odds stacked against you, is a powerful force, maybe even a channel for the miraculous power of God?

Jesus was never put off by lack of resources. And Jesus was always grateful to his heavenly Father.

Again on a tangent, but when I did a search on the words “gave thanks” the other passages that lit up were all to do with the last supper.

Mt 26:26* While they were eating, Jesus took bread, **gave thanks** and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.” **27*** Then he took the cup, **gave thanks** and offered it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you.

I find it very interesting that as Jesus shared the bread and the wine, explaining that his body and blood were to be given to us, so that our sins would be forgiven, he also gave thanks. Just as he gave thanks for the loaves and fishes. And in a similar but much more wonderful way, just as the loaves were more than sufficient for the five thousand, so is the body and blood of our Lord, more than sufficient for the sins of the whole world.

And what of this morning's readings? The woman who poured perfume on Jesus feet, did a beautiful thing, and Jesus was grateful for her action, and honoured her before Simon and the others in the household. David out of his gratitude towards God, danced with all his might before the ark of the covenant. The foreign leper came back to thank Jesus, and God for his healing. Unfortunately the other nine didn't.

Are we grateful? Has our gratitude dwindled? Do we do things we used to with the same joy, or have we become automatic, and possibly disheartened? Have we lost the expectation that God has great things in store for us in this life and the next? Have we lost the wonder of knowing that God sent his Son so that by his death, and resurrection, full atonement has been secured for us sinners?

Before I try to answer that, I wish to ask another question. What are signs of gratitude in a person?

The first thing that comes to mind is giving. I believe that a person who practices gratitude, also gives out of the overflow of that gratitude. Zaccheus is an example of that. Without being asked, he volunteered to give half of his possessions to the poor, and pay back fourfold anyone who he had cheated.

Lu 19:8* But **Zacchaeus** stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”

Why was Zachaeus so *rash* in making these statements?

My answer is very cheeky, and probably reflects my underlying idolatry of guitars.

I happily lend out my yamaha guitar, now that I own a Gibson!
Money was far less important to Zachaeus, now that he had fellowship with Jesus, and his sins were forgiven. He knew where his real treasure lay. And now he was receiving the goal of his faith, intimate friendship with Jesus, who was willing to associate with a tax collector, who, up to that point, had been far from God's kingdom. This was a moment of great joy, and gratitude, and giving.

As well as giving I will mention forgiving. I believe that when we are thankful in attitude, we are also willing to forgive others in a true way.

If we are thankful we also have joy an peace, willingness in worship and prayer. I also think our endurance, our devotion to people and to God's purpose in our lives all come out of our sense of gratitude to God.

If we lack these, maybe we are lacking in gratitude?

How do we get back on track???

I don't know if the answer is simple. I could list activities such as praying, singing, refreshing ourselves in the truth of what God has done for us, taking time out to reflect and remember how we came to love at first, in our Christian lives, but I don't know if that is wise advice.

Recognizing that our love has grown cold, confessing this in our hearts to God (and in confidence to trusted friends), asking for him to heal and restore us, and repenting of the actions and attitudes that have caused us to drift from our true and first love may be better advice.

What I do know is that our God is wonderful. He is the initiator and finisher of our faith. He is utterly worthy of every act and word of praise that proceeds from our hearts and lips. And his grace is powerful; powerful enough to change things in our lives that might be considered unchangeable. Powerful enough to turn us around and present us faultless before his throne. (With great joy!)

Let us rouse every resource available to us to praise his name.

Ecclesiastes 5

18* Then I realised that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labour under the sun during the few days of life God has given him-- for this is his lot.

19* Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work--this is a gift of God. 20* He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart.