

The Way Forward – Thankfulness

Psalm 100

In Luke 17, we find the story of the 10 lepers. Lepers describes men and women battling a disease that results in them being banished from the general population. They were often told to stay outside the city walls and were a forgotten group of people. They see Jesus and cry out “Jesus, have mercy on us.”

Jesus does, heals all 10 lepers and a little later one comes back to say thank you. In fact, verse 16 says he fell at Jesus’ feet and gave thanks. Jesus looks around and notices something peculiar. He only sees one. Causes him to question his own sanity.

Wait, I thought I saw 10 people, and I am pretty sure I healed all 10 of them. Why has only 1 come back?

Jesus calls them out for their lack of thankfulness. It matters to Jesus.

This caused me to find the definition of thankfulness...which turned out to be quite elusive. Track with me here...

Definition of Thankfulness:

feeling or expressing gratitude; appreciative.

Therefore, thankfulness is something we choose to do express our feeling of gratitude. So, let’s keep going with this definition.

Definition of Gratitude:

the quality or feeling of being grateful or thankful

Definition of Grateful:

warmly or deeply appreciative of kindness or benefits received; thankful:

There it is! Thankfulness, gratitude, being grateful is a response to receiving something...either kindness or benefits.

That is what the one leper did, he went back to Jesus to give thanks because he had received from Jesus both the kindness of his attention and the benefit of being healed.

This interaction in Luke between Jesus and the lepers teaches us a couple things.

1. Jesus equates thanking him to praising God.

2. Giving thanks does not change what we have received but it is a choice we make afterwards.

Listen, almost all of us know saying “thank you” is important. We teach our children at a young age to say than you when they get something. If we

Thankfulness has its foundation in the Bible. We are told time and time again to give thanks. But this morning is not about the polite habit of saying thank you, no I want to reorient your thankfulness.

We don’t need to be told to say thank you. Look no further than social media in the last week.

#thankful
#grateful
#blessed

I have seen posts and pictures of thankfulness for everything. Family, food, toys, TV’s, phones. Many of us have spent the last few days expressing our gratitude.

But there are others, maybe some of you, who find this weekend very hard. I have no doubt that some of us are struggling to give thanks. Life is hard, it is a struggle and filled with brokenness, hurt and sorrow. You find no reason in your life to give thanks right now.

Whether you find yourself extremely grateful this weekend or struggling to find reason to give thanks, both can hold us back from giving thanks to God. You see this morning, I want to take the focus off created things, and put it on the creator, off the temporal and put it on the eternal, off the gift and on the giver.

By the time we are done looking at God’s Word, I want you walking away with this one idea:

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When we find joy in our salvation, we can find thankfulness in all situations.

Let me say it again, the one idea for today:

When we find joy in our salvation we can find thankfulness in all situations.

Let’s Pray

Will you take out your Bible and find Psalm 100. While you do this, I am going to pray before we continue.

Here now, the word of our Father.

Psalm 100

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth!

² *Serve the Lord with gladness!*

Come into his presence with singing!

³ *Know that the Lord, he is God!*

It is he who made us, and we are his;

we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

⁴ *Enter his gates with thanksgiving,*

and his courts with praise!

Give thanks to him; bless his name!

⁵ *For the Lord is good;*

his steadfast love endures forever,

and his faithfulness to all generations.

Verses 1 and 2 echo what we heard last week from Pastor Mike. Singing is one way we express our gratitude to God. Let me also point out the beginning of verse 2:

Serve the Lord with gladness.

Our service is also an expression of our thanks for God. As a child, my mom or dad would often ask me to do something around the house, and my initial response was never gladness.

In fact, it was the opposite. I would pout, slump my shoulders, rolls my eyes, stomp my feet. The next words out of my parent's mouth was always, "if you are not going to do it with a good attitude, don't do it at all!"

I always thought, "great, I won't do it."

That never worked.

At the time, I did not know that my parents were instilling in me a Biblical truth. To serve with gladness. Which takes thankfulness.

What we see is that as we grasp who God is and what He has done, it becomes easy to serve Him with gladness.

With that we get some instruction, I believe our thankfulness to God can be misdirected, and I want to give you 3 warnings to look out for.

1. Perspective Can Hinder Our Thankfulness

Verse 3 orients our thankfulness back to God. There is a command in these words, to know the Lord is God.

It is very easy for us to lose perspective. Our day to day can be so busy and focused on getting things done, that we often forget to take the time to pursue God.

The perspective I believe we need to be reminded of is one of eternity.

Jesus warned us to not keep put focus on treasures of this earth, but rather on the treasures of Heaven.

When Pastor Mike tells us that eternity changes everything, he is reinforcing the words of Jesus and helping us reorient our perspective.

Two ways perspective matters:

It will all pass away – when we focus ourselves so much on the temporary, we forget that it will not last. This does not mean we don't work hard, make wise decisions and live well. Jesus just wants us to not lose perspective. His work is one for eternity.

Our present struggles won't compare – these are the words of Paul to us in Romans. He wants us to hear that our future glory, one that is with God in a place Jesus is preparing right now will be so unimaginably great that our present struggles will pale in comparison.

So, maybe you are so focused on building a great life for you on Earth that you forget about God, or maybe life is so difficult and full of trials that you can't imagine

A couple years ago we had a man walk into the Highland Park Campus off the street, he was not looking for a Church, but he wandered in sat down and stayed for a couple weeks. In this couple weeks, I got to spend some time with him and learned that he was a lifelong HP resident, Jewish and really struggling. He was in some financial distress and it was making his marriage hard and his future unsecure. He had lost his job and a lot of his money on a risky investment.

Over the course of a couple months he met with a variety of people, all pointing him to Jesus as the Messiah. He met a Messianic Rabbi at a Jewish Bible Study, and I had heard that he prayed to repent of his sin and believe in Jesus.

A couple weeks after that he came to one of our small group gatherings. I was talking with him and celebrating his new faith in Jesus. His response to me that night was:

“Nothing had changed, my life is still a mess.”

I told him Jesus doesn't promise to make everything on earth better for us, but he secures our eternal future and that changes the way we think about our present situation. His response...

"I need things to get better now."

Don't let your perspective hinder you from giving thanks to God.

2. Pride Can Hinder Our Thankfulness.

As we continue in verse 3, the psalmist declares God as our creator. It is he who made us.

Pride can show up in 2 very dangerous ways to hinder our thankfulness. We fall into the trap that we deserve whatever we want or that we have earned it ourselves.

Think back to the story of Jesus and the lepers. I did not mention verse 18. When he asks questions where the other 9 are, he points out that only one to come back was a foreigner. We know from the story that he was a Samaritan and they were outside the city of Jerusalem. It is fair to assume that the other 8 were probably Jewish.

The chosen people of God. Yet, when they were healed by Jesus, the coming Messiah, God in the flesh. They were nowhere to be found.

It was a common theme with Jesus and the Jewish people. They missed the point because their pride got in the way. This was especially true of the Jewish leaders. Jesus was always calling them out for their pride.

I get pride, it hinders me from a lot. One of those things is asking for help.

Every woman knows exactly what I am talking about. Men don't ask for help.

I can do this, is pretty much my response to every situation I occur. You want help, "nope" I can do this.

We all translate this to our salvation. We try so hard to convince ourselves that we can save ourselves.

The Psalmist is saying God made us, God saves us. We need God. He does not need us.

Don't let your pride hinder you from giving thanks to God.

3. Affluence Can Hinder Our Thankfulness

If I have not come into your neighborhood, I am about to now. First, let's add some perspective to affluence. If you are listening to this sermon, you are a person of affluence. I am person of affluence. When stacked up against every person on the globe, and every person that has ever lived. We are at the top of the list when sorted by wealth. We are a financially wealthy group of people.

But, it is not just the globe, it is this country. I am in Lake Forest, Illinois. One of the wealthiest cities in America. There is tremendous wealth in this Church. Therefore, we must all listen particularly close to what the Bible has to say about wealth.

Jesus talked about money a lot. He did not hold back when talking about people who have lots of money. After watching the rich, young man walk away because he could not leave his riches (Matthew 19:16), he told the disciples:

"Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." (Matthew 19:23-24)

When Paul was giving instruction Timothy, he told them to look out for those who are wealthy and to teach them not to fall away from the Church, because the root of evil was the love of money. He says in 1 Timothy 6:17:

"As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy."

Affluence has some nasty side effects, and you need to hear this.

First, we rely on ourselves so much more than we should. When we can buy whatever we want, why would we ever think about needing God. We create such a haven for ourselves that we just don't think we need God.

Second, we stop being content. We always want more. No surprise, because money does not satisfy. But what it does do is give us the opportunity to try and try again to be satisfied. We are always looking for the next big thing that can make us happy. And we never look to God. We turn out wants into needs.

Verse 3 reminds us that we are sheep of God's pasture. He is our good shepherd. You know what a good shepherd does? He takes care of his sheep and makes sure they have what they need. The other thing about sheep, they are for the shepherd. It is the shepherd who reaps the benefits of taking care of the sheep.

You may think that you have earned everything you have, but you forget that it is from God, and ultimately for God. After Paul give Timothy the advice to help the rich not lose

sight of God, he gives some pretty radical advice...he tells him to teach the reach to be generous, and to give the riches away. To be rich in good works.

I have shared before that I have struggled with a gambling addiction. As God's grace has helped me overcome this addiction I have some valuable lessons learned. One of which is generosity.

I believe the Bible tells us to give sacrificially. Kellie and I have determined that that means our giving should hurt a little. We give in such a way that we don't get to do some things we may be able to do if we give less. Our cars are a little older, we travel less than we would like and we can't afford everything we want because we want to be generous with our money.

You see, when I was a gambler, I lost a lot of money. I racked up a lot of debt. As a result, I did not have a lot of money to spend. I could not buy a new car or go travel very often.

The lesson I learned, if I can lose my money gambling, then I can lose my money by being generous with it. If I was willing to sacrifice spending money on gambling, why would I not being willing to lose my spending money by giving it away.

Generosity is a practical way of not letting your riches prevent you from relying on God. When we rely on God, the Good Shepherd, He will take care of you.

Don't let affluence hinder you from giving thanks to God.

Ok, 3 warnings against not giving thanks.

Perspective, Pride and Affluence. They all get in the way of giving thanks to God. But it begs the question that must be answered. Why should I give thanks to God.

Let's finish by looking at three things in verse 5 we can always give thanks for.

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1. Be Thankful for Who God Is

God is good. It may not feel like it every day, but the truth about God is that he is good. He is all loving, all powerful, just and merciful. He has your best in mind, and everything he has done since creating us is work to redeem us and bring us back to Him.

The best thing that can happen to us is to discover life with God.

When thankfulness shows up in the Bible, it is often alongside thanking God for just being God.

Verses like Psalm 44:8

In God we have boasted continually, and we will give thanks to your name forever.

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2. Be Thankful for What God Has Done

What is it? What has God done that deserves our thanks? Psalm 100 tells us about his steadfast love and faithfulness to all generations.

Romans 5:8 - but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

This is the Gospel.

There is no greater love than the love shown to us with the death of Jesus on the cross. Perspective, pride and affluence all meet their match in the Gospel.

When we have the perspective that we will live forever, either with God or without God, and overcome the pride that we cannot save ourselves and we don't let the affluence we have on this earth prevent us from turning to God for our salvation...we have the Gospel.

An undeserved gift.

We have received something. We are the lepers. We are the sick that have been cast out because we cannot be healed. Jesus heals us.

When I read the story of the lepers, I see myself. And I ask myself, would Jesus look at my life and say "didn't I save Dan? Why has he not come to say thank you."

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3. Be Thankful Forever

When I was preparing for this sermon, I just searched the Bible for all the places it mentions thankfulness. One thing stood out above everything I read. Often, we find the word "forever" with "thanksgiving."

We will forever be giving thanks and we should be giving thanks to God because he loves us forever.

This again, speaks to our perspective.

There is more than just today. There is more than just what this earth has for us.

So, give thanks. But don't limit your thankfulness for that which is temporary. Or, don't forget that you always have something to be thankful for.

Do you remember, the one idea I want you to leave with?

Find joy in your salvation.

You saved by God's grace, not your works. You will live forever with God, not because of something you did, but because of something Jesus did.

Finding joy in your salvation is the beginning of giving thanks in all situations. If you are sharing your gratitude this Thanksgiving, I am happy for you. You do have a lot to be thankful for, but it is not the end of your story.

If you are having a hard time with gratitude this season. I'm sorry. Life can be brutal. The struggles you are going through are real, and deserve attention. It is not fair. But is also not the end of your story.