

Season of Gratitude

April 24, 2016

Gratitude is an attitude of the heart. There are people who never utter the words “Thank you.” Their world view is one of entitlement and they seemingly never feel nor show appreciation for anything that comes their way. One of the priceless attributes of King David was the fact that he never forgot that God brought him from the sheepfold and gave him a palace and the responsibility of being a King of Israel. That elevation from the lowest degree to the highest position in the land was something that David always kept in the back of his mind for he continually praised and glorified the Lord God of heaven. In Psalms 121:1-2, David declares, “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills. From whence cometh my help? My help cometh from the LORD who made heaven and earth.” In Psalms 124, David remembers the God of Israel who delivered the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage. He states that if God had not been on their side, their enemies would have swallowed them up alive as their enemies’ wrath was elevated due to all the plagues they had endured from God. God allowed the Children of Israel to cross the Red Sea on dry ground, yet the Egyptians were drowned when they attempted to follow in an attempt to capture the former slaves. Do you stop to ponder how the power of God has protected you in your life? If you have trusted in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you are a free person. You may not be free to come and go as you please, but you are free to worship God, free to read his word and communicate with him; free to live a life that is pleasing to him and will bring glory and honor to his name even while you are here. Your life can be transformed by the renewing of your mind when you commit yourself to serving Jesus Christ and choose a different path than Satan’s ruler ship over your soul.

Verse 6 says, “Blessed be the LORD who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth.”

David compares their deliverance to a bird who escaped the snare set for him. The snare is broken and the Israelites escaped. He ends the Psalm with these words “Our help is in the name of the LORD who made heaven and earth. David speaks of the gratitude of the hearts of the people when they were released from captivity of Zion in Psalms 126. It was like a dream come true. Their mouths were filled with laughter and their tongue with singing. They were looked on by other nations who said, “The LORD hath done great things for them.” God is able to deliver you from the sins of your past and give you freedom in the Holy Spirit.

In 2 Samuel 7:25, David prayed a prayer of gratitude to the LORD and his request is that God will establish his throne forever. He prayed that God’s name will be magnified forever and he asked that his own house will be established before the LORD. When the angel of the LORD appeared to Mary, mother of Jesus, the promise was that there would be no end to his kingdom as God had promised to Jesus’ ancestor, King David.

In the Bible, there are examples of people who are the opposite of King David in their response to God's gifts and blessings. The story of Nabal is one example of this type of person. In 1 Samuel 25, the death of Samuel, the prophet is recorded. It then mentions that David and his men went to the wilderness of Paran. There was a wealthy man who belonged to the lineage of Caleb, who dwelled there. The Bible says that he was very great and he had 3000 sheep, 1000 goats and he was shearing his sheep in Carmel. Nabal had a beautiful wife, Abigail, who was full of wisdom and she was respected by the servants of Nabal. However Nabal was harsh and behaved badly. He mistreated his family, his servants and only thought about himself and what he could get for himself.

David and his men had protected the shepherds and all the flocks while Nabal was away on business and after a period of time, David sent 10 men to approach Nabal about receiving some compensation for their labor and good deeds.

He gave them a message to present to Nabal saying "Peace be both to you and your house and unto all that you have." He informed Nabal of the services that he and his men had provided for Nabal concerning watching over the interests of his investments and herdsmen and David expected that in appreciation for their efforts, Nabal would give them some food in return. Instead, Nabal spoke rudely and condescending to them. After they had delivered the message that David had given to them, Nabal asked "Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants nowadays who break away from their masters. Am I to take my bread and water and sheep that I have killed and give them to men that I don't even know who they are or where they come from? Get out of here!" The men returned and gave the report to David. David was angry because he felt that their labor had been in vain for the man didn't even appreciate what they had done for him. He deserved compensation for the work that he and his men had provided for Nabal.

David told his men to prepare to attack and destroy Nabal's household. One of Nabal's servants realized the severity of the situation and went directly to Abigail and told her that David and his men had been treated badly by Nabal when they approached him for payment for the work that they had done for him. He explained that David and his men had stayed with the herdsmen and watched over the flocks day and night while they were there. They were like a wall around Nabal's servants watching over the sheep so no harm came to them. Now because of Nabal's bad attitude, David had planned an attack on all that he possessed. The servant called Nabal a worthless fellow and no one could speak to him about anything. Abigail made haste, loaded a donkey with loaves of bread, wine, dressed sheep, grain, raisins and cakes of figs and told the servant to take her to David. When she arrived to the spot where David was preparing for battle, she fell at his feet and took the responsibility upon herself for her husband's bad behavior. She told David that

he was like his name which meant folly and she asked for mercy for her and her household. David responded by saying, "Blessed be the LORD God who sent you this day to meet me and blessed is your advice. You are blessed because you kept me from shedding blood and from avenging myself with my own hand. Go in peace to your house; see I have harkened to your voice and have accepted your person."

Abigail returned home and realized that in her absence, her husband had held a feast and was drunk from wine. The next morning she told him the story and his heart died within him and he became as a stone. Ten days later, God smote him and he died. Abigail became David's wife.

How many of us are thankful to God that the first settlers in our country were so thankful that God had spared their lives, given them food to eat and a way to survive hardships that they instituted a special day of the year, called it Thanksgiving and we still observe that day every year. Discovery of the land was just the first step for our country to becoming a great nation. Many people died from illness and starvation during the initial settling of the nation of America, but God was praised and given thanks as the settlers learned to grow crops and to use the resources that were available to them in the new land. Many people forget that God sustains and provides for people or we would all perish. We should cultivate a sense of gratitude to God for his mercy and kindness to the inhabitants of the earth. How many people go through life without ever having a thankful heart for anything. God places people in our lives and we don't appreciate and treat them the way that God desire us to. We take so much for granted and sometimes we judge others by a standard that we set instead of searching our own hearts to understand what we need to do to be right with our Creator. A wonderful Christian man attends our church. He volunteers in jail ministry; he helped to start a couple of homeless shelters for men and women, visits nursing homes, as well as rescues abused animals and nurtures them back to health among other things. He is now a member of our church. He was introduced to us by Mark, a former inmate and homeless resident who Leroy and I had mentored and now follows Jesus and lives a law-abiding life. He called me on the phone and wanted to come to our church and bring his friend. I told him that absolutely he was welcome to attend our church. He asked if his friend was welcome also. I asked him why he would ask me that question since he knows that our congregation welcomes people in our church. He said, "Well, he has really long hair and I didn't want him to be judged because of it. He is not welcome in many churches because of the length of his hair and he doesn't dress up in a suit and tie to attend church." We welcomed him and found this great man who has a heart for people that is rare to come by. I mentioned that he takes the gospel into nursing homes and shares time with them to win them to Jesus Christ that they might have eternal life. He spoke to us of a resident in a nursing home who would

not listen to his message because he has long hair. His style of clothing causes some to look down on him and label him "unacceptable" to be in their congregation. We have been blessed by his ministry and God uses him to reach the lost in jails, shelters, and nursing homes and to encourage people in their faith. God looks at us differently than we look at each other. Judging causes us to miss the inner beauty of God in people around us.

Being a woman pastor is a cause for some people to reject me. There are people who won't attend our church services because often we have former inmates who come to our church and they are welcomed there. People who misjudge miss an opportunity of seeing God work in people's lives that have been broken, rejected and have been lifted from a life of sin.

God called me to his service after Jesus Christ saved me from a rebellious, sinful life. He took the roots of hate, bitterness, anger, and rage, fear, and doubts from my heart and in its place, He planted faith, hope, love, peace, joy, thankfulness, and a desire to share with others. In order for you to enjoy the freedom of having your sins forgiven and an opportunity to enjoy life on this earth and eternal life with Jesus Christ forever, you need to hear the gospel and believe. I asked God, "Lord, how can I repay you for all you have done for me? He said, "Go and find those who are burdened with sin just as you were and tell them the good news that they can be forgiven and have eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ." My heart is so full of thankfulness for his love to me that I am willing to go where I have an opportunity to share Jesus with others.

A few weeks ago, I preached to our congregation a sermon on forgiveness. The sermon really spoke to my heart as I prepared it and then again when I brought it to our congregation. Some of the members mentioned that the sermon was one they enjoyed immensely. However, when I got home from church a man's name came to me. His actions had caused some hurt to my family 24 years ago and we had exchanged some words at that time and I had never really had much contact with him since. Recently he had been arrested and taken to jail on some serious charges and was being held in jail until a date would be set for him to go before a judge for sentencing. After my sermon on forgiveness, his name came into my mind and I couldn't shake the voice that was speaking to my heart to write him a letter and apologize for the way I spoke to him and treated him following the incident so many years ago. I argued a bit with myself with things like, "He deserved the tongue lashing I gave him; he probably never thinks of me anyhow and now he is in serious trouble, what difference will it make?" Perhaps you also have had some of these thoughts when you try to straighten out your life when it seems to be tangled like a ball of yarn that a kitten gets ahold of and strews all over the room. Some things seem impossible to ever have a positive outcome.

After praying about the situation for a while I sat down to write. I asked him to forgive me for the disrespectful way that I spoke to him and also for the bad feelings I held towards him for a number of years. I told him about the prison ministry that I have been involved in for a number of years. I encouraged him to attend the church services available at the jail. I shared a little bit about the gospel and my own struggles with sin in the past and how God has changed my life. I didn't get a response right away, but my heart was lighter for contacting him and making the effort to correct a wrong that I was involved in. A few days later, I received a wonderful letter from him. He thanked me for writing and encouraging him. He accepted my offer of friendship during his time behind the fence.. He told me that he was attending the church services and he is looking to straighten out his life and I had given him hope and faith in God and his redemptive plan. We will never reach the point of perfection until we are in heaven, but when something comes to our minds of offences that we have done to other people, we must eat humble pie and make it right. It could mean the difference in the other person's life to accept Christ. The men in this room have opportunities to make a difference in people's lives that are around you every day. Seeking revenge is not an appropriate method of correcting evil deeds that have been dealt to you. The Bible tells us to pray for our enemies. It says a soft answer turns away wrath. The Lord's Prayer says "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." See Matthew 6:12. When I pray that prayer, I often stop and meditate on the meaning. I am asking God to forgive me of my shortcomings, my failures, my poor choices, just as I forgive the people that have mistreated me. In the very same measure!! The Beatitudes say, "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called "sons of God. Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy." "Do unto others as you would have them do to you." See Matthew 5 for Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and Luke 6:31.

In closing, I would like to read you the CEV version of Luke 6:37. Jesus said, " Don't judge others and God won't judge you. Don't be hard on others, and God won't be hard on you. Forgive others, and God will forgive you. If you give to others you will be given a full amount in return. It will be packed down, shaken together and spilling over into your lap. The way you treat others is the way you will be treated". Read these Scriptures and ask God to help you apply them to your life. When you do these Commandments you will find that the negativity in your life will disappear as the light of God's word shines in your heart. God loves you; Leroy and I love you as brothers in Christ and we are here to let you know that you have a brighter future as you commit your life into the hands of the Creator, Jesus Christ. All things are possible to those who believe.

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