

Sunday Sermon 11242024 Joel 2:27/ Psalm 126:3/ 1Timothy 2:6/ Matthew 6:32

"Our Gratitude Begins and Ends with God"

We have two coffee mugs in our china cabinet that Euni and I have a particular soft spot for. Although slightly homely in appearance, they are the most precious amongst all the items there. When my daughter and son were in third and first grade, respectively, they collected their pocket money and purchased their first Mother's and Father's Day gifts for us.

Did I wish they had presented me with an Airstream Classic travel trailer? Sure, but that wouldn't have fit in the china cabinet. These precious mugs here say "A SPECIAL MOM" and "A SPECIAL DAD."

We poured coffee in them nearly daily for the first five years. After that, we kept them in the china cabinet and do not use them to this day. Not because we were disappointed that we didn't get the Airstream, but because we did not want the patterns and letters of the mugs to fade, and we wanted to keep them for a long time. These mugs were a prized symbol of our young children's gratitude and love for us.

We read four scriptures today, two from each testament, in relation to the subject of "thanksgiving." Each text highlights one condition of gratitude that I would like to focus on. Of course, this may be far from the Thanksgiving we typically think of. But by the end of the message, I hope we will see that these are the most fundamental and definitive conditions of appreciation.

I. First, the scripture from Joel shows that we should thank God that He is with us.

There is a breaking weather report that tomorrow evening there will be a big flood in Wrightwood, the likes of which we have never seen. Therefore, the good members of the Wrightwood Ministers' Association have prepared three devices with which to rescue you all. We have personal rubber tubes, pedal boats, and warships. Which of the three would you use during a flood?

Some daredevils may want to enjoy the thrill and suspense of riding a flash flood in a tube—yes, I'm talking about you, Bruce LaClaire! But for our own guarantee of safety, I am certain that most of us would board the warship.

And in case you haven't caught on, there is no big flood. I just used this story strictly for illustrative purposes and apologize if I startled anyone.

In Joel 1:27, God says, "I am in the midst of my people. I am the Lord. And there is no other God except me." In other words, God is declaring that He, "the only, Almighty God in the world, is with us today." Could there be any greater, breaking news in our lives than that?

Do you appreciate that such an omnipotent, great, and singular God is our Savior? Is there a reason why such a God should be with us? No one among us has the qualifications to deserve such goodness. But He is with us because He loves us unilaterally. The fact that God is with us and in the midst of us is as if we had boarded an unshakeable warship in a flood.

II. Now, looking at Psalm 126:3, the Scripture underscores that we should thank God that He has done great things for us.

It is by the grace of God that we have all been able to live this past year. Do you believe that you have come this far by yourself? No, He has worked tirelessly for you, and He has protected and watched over you so that you could work for yourself.

We eat healthy, take medicine and health supplements, exercise, and enjoy hobbies for our well-being. But do you believe that your life is being extended because of these acts? Through all these things, do you recognize God in you, working for you?

Trust in God's providence over you and thank Him. He blesses us to experience His great goodness and blessings and to fulfill His wondrous works.

III. Now looking at the New Testament, the text of 1 Timothy 2:6 highlights that we should thank Jesus for paying our ransom.

Conventional worldview tends to think that the greatest beings in the universe are those that have power or control over others. However, the Bible declares that the greatest beings are those that serve. Only Jesus Christ fulfilled this mission.

So according to world view, it would be hard to believe Jesus as our savior and easier to believe him as merely a saint. But we do not need him as a saint. Why? Because each one of us is a saint. I am a saint, too, in the love of Christ! You know there's a little bit of good in me. Sometimes, when you doze off during my preaching, I don't scold you. Instead, in my heart, I gently sing you a lullaby! Hah ha!

Instead, what we need is a redeemer to free us forever as children of the Creator. Jesus Christ fulfilled that need. So, Jesus paid the ransom for us, and he is our hope and strength, no matter what circumstance we are in.

IV. Lastly, through Matthew 6:32, the Word tells us to thank our Heavenly Father for knowing all that we need.

America is a nation that highly prioritizes and provides human rights. But our government is not responsible for all our lives. The president of the United States can make promises for our needs but does not have the capacity to keep them all. However, our Creator, God, has that power and has given us that promise. He knows our needs because He wants to fulfill those needs.

In verse 33, Jesus said, "Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." We always prioritize meeting our own needs. But when we focus on our own desires, we cannot experience God's prosperity. However, putting "the kingdom of God and his righteousness" first is a principle that results in both "God and man" and "Him and us" prospering.

I had previously served at a church in San Marcos. At that time, my daughter's family lived in LA, and the drive to see my two grandsons took about an hour and a half by car. I wished I could live 30 minutes away, close enough to see my grandkids as much as I wanted but not close enough that I would be required to babysit daily.

But I was appointed to the church in Borrego Springs, and the distance grew to three and a half hours. As much as I loved Borrego, I loved my grandsons more. I am joking, but I could not bring myself to thank God for that long distance between my grandchildren and me. I prayed about how I could narrow the distance.

One year later, my son-in-law got a job in San Francisco, and ironically, my daughter's family relocated even farther. Now the distance between us was about eight and a half hours. But now, my wife Euni and I gave thanks to God every time we drove that long distance. The world's circumstances were not always carried out according to our own plans and wishes. And who knows? One day, the distance could have been even farther.

Euni and I learned how to make good use of that eight-and-a-half-hour drive time. We sang, did vocal practice, listened to lectures, argued, made up, and studied English. You would think with all of the driving we've done so far, Euni and I would be able to argue in grammatically perfect English by now.

Sometimes, eight and a half hours were too short for us, and what initially seemed like such a hurdle had become a blessing. This was proof that God is truly our master; He knows what we need and therefore fulfills those needs.

Johnson Oatman Jr., a Methodist minister, published a hymn poem called "Blessings" in 1897. The hymn is now called "Count on Your Blessings."

1. When upon life's billows you are tempest-tossed, when you are discouraged, thinking all is lost. Count your many blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord has done.

2. Are you ever burdened with a load of care? Does the cross seem heavy you are called to bear? Count your many blessings, every doubt will fly, and you will keep singing as the days go by.

3. When you look at others with their lands and gold, think that Christ has promised you His wealth untold; Count your many blessings, money cannot buy, Your reward in heaven, nor your home on high.

4. So, amid the conflict whether great or small, do not be discouraged, God is over all; Count your many blessings, angels will attend, Help and comfort give you to your journey's end.

These two coffee mugs in our china cabinet are a reminder of my daughter and son's love. However, the more we look at and treasure those mugs, the more we wonder what gifts we can give our children. These mugs were probably purchased at maybe \$1 or \$1.50 almost 30 years ago.

But as parents, our desire is to give our children gifts worth 10, 100, or 1000 times more than that. And such is God's love for us.

We can see through the Bible that God wants to receive heartfelt worship and gifts from us. He is delighted and pleased with the love fellowship between Him and us that is accomplished through our worship and offering.

We should, of course, be thankful to the Lord for our possessions, our health, and the abundant circumstances of our lives. But first and foremost, we ought to be able to thank our Creator, God, for being our master. Such a heart of sincere gratitude is the most valuable, powerful, and eternal gift that we can give to God, our Lord of Life.

Church, I pray that as we experience our Thanksgiving this year, our hearts of gratitude are centered on the unexplainable and undeserving goodness of God and that we can boldly enjoy our life on earth in the faith and hope for our eternal life in heaven.

So today, I sing my bold faith in God in this way!

“Count your blessings, name them one by one; Count your blessings, see what God has done! Count your blessings, name them one by one; And it will surprise you what the Lord has done.” Amen.

Reflections and Applications for Today's Sermon:

1. Among the four sermon texts for today (Joel 2:21–27, Psalm 126, 1 Timothy 2:1–7, Matthew 6:25–33), which one resonates with you the most, and why?
2. As we celebrate Thanksgiving, take time to list at least 21 things you are grateful for. Reflect on your list and note any realizations or insights you gain.
3. How would you like to express your gratitude? Consider how you might do so during today's fellowship, throughout the week, and on Thanksgiving Day.