

“Give Thanks to the Lord”

It is November, the month of Thanksgiving Day, one of my favorite holidays, although the least favorite holiday of my waistline. It seems like we hear the word “thanks” much more often this month, don’t you think? Especially in sermons from the pulpit. Sorry in advance.

But sometimes, the word “thanks” can be burdensome. You might wonder, why is God always asking us to give thanks? Is he a being that is so craving gratitude? On the contrary, what he asks for is nothing compared to what he has given to us.

Through the scriptures today, let’s examine how our faith and thanks are related to each other.

I. Is it our duty to give thanks in all circumstances?

We remember the apostle Paul recommending that we “give thanks in all circumstances.” And in all circumstances, good and bad, joyful and painful, and happy and sorrowful, are all mixed in there. It’s easy to give thanks when we are happy, but how can we be thankful in every circumstance? That seems like an inhuman task, does it not?

However, Paul’s recommendation of giving thanks is not one that is derived out of duty. Rather it is because God is the one who is able give us peace and comfort in any situation and allows to give thanks in any situation. Do you think that God comforts us when we are down grudgingly? No. he does so with joy. Why? Because he loves us as his children. That is why we always give thanks to God. Because he is always there for us. He is the one who wishes to do so. It is our privilege as God’s children to give thanks to him.

Today’s scripture includes other messages in the Bible that teach us to give thanks for the benefits that we have already received, something like, “Give thanks to the Lord, all you whom he has saved, whom he has rescued from your enemies, whom he has saved from their distress.”

The scripture of Psalms today connects thanksgiving and the journey of Israel in the desert in verse 4, and it says, "Some wandered in the trackless desert and could not find their way to a city to live in." By the way, there are some people who are the same way in the 21st century.

One afternoon in April 2016, Euni and I went for a drive when we got our Subaru Outback. We had just completed our first trail at the Slot, which was a 2.2-mile loop trail near Borrego Springs, and were driving back. But we decided to test out the car a little because it was our first all-wheel-drive car. We didn't think that we would have any problems maneuvering through, so we took it to a dried sand wash.

Equipped with our maps and smart phones, we drove for a while with joy, excitement, and worry-free. However, the sand road got narrower as we went further. Thorn bushes were spread on each side of the road. I began to worry about scratching our new car, and it was getting darker.

Moreover, the tire tracks in the sand began to disappear as well. All of a sudden, our car engine was revving, but we stopped moving. That's when I learned even "All Wheel Drive" can get stuck in the sand.

We were seeing a lot of lights glowing in the night from Borrego town straight ahead. We knew the town was not far from where we were stuck. However, we could not contact anyone because we had no idea where we were. Soon after, night came, and we were enveloped in the darkness of night.

The first thing we did was pray to our all-powerful God to help us out of this dilemma. Then we relied on the power of the all-wheel drive. I tried to drive the car out of the sand but failed again and again. I let Euni sit in the driver's seat and try to drive out while I pushed from the back with all my might. And finally, we got out of the sand.

However, we didn't know where to go at first. Following the lights from the airport, we drove forward very carefully and slowly. There, we saw a sign for the first time stating that the roads on the desert sands were for "off-highway vehicles" and not "all-wheel-drive"

automobiles. We realized then that even the flat desert terrain with only small bushes was still so dangerous!

At that time, Euni and I felt as if we had become the real descendants of Israel, not through 40 years but just one night in the Borrego Badlands desert. Hallelujah!

The Israelites didn't have any smart phones or night lights from a town to follow. During their 40-year journey through the trackless desert, the Israelites learned that their God was the only and true road for them forever. Therefore, they were able to give thanks to God, their savior. God is endless in his mercy and steadfast love. So he supplies us with the conditions that allow us to give thanksgiving first because we are so touched by his grace, mercy, and love.

However, why are our mouths often clamped shut, not giving thanks, or spewing wide-open complaints? We obsess over the things that are unreceived, lost, and missed. But I tell you that those who do not give thanks will be so caught up in complaints that they will fail to see the blessings God puts in front of them. The condition of thanksgiving will overflow when we give thanks. Therefore, thanksgiving is our privilege.

Johnson Oatman Jr. wrote a hymn in 1897 that goes like this:

“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 be singing as the days go by.
Count your blessings - name them one by one,
Count your blessings - see what God hath done;
Count your blessings - name them one by one,
Count your many blessings - see what God hath done.”

II. Is our thanksgiving to please God?

Of course, that is not the wrong description, but do you think God needs our thanks? Is pleasing God through our thanksgiving really for God? The God who received animal sacrifice in the Old Testament asked, “Do you think I want your animal sacrifice because I am hungry?” “Don't you know everything in the world is

mine?” God tells us that he commands sacrifice from us so that we can understand what it means to live in his presence.

We sacrifice because we are thankful, and when we are thankful, we are joyful. I want to emphasize that thanksgiving is the best refreshment for us, both spiritually and physically. The willpower, heart, and determination for thanksgiving produce the emotion and action of positive attitude, hope, love, and faith.

III. The best form of thanksgiving for us is to accept the Bible as the word of God.

What is the serious loss for today’s generation? It is a lack of faith and a failure to accept the Bible as the absolute truth. God revealed himself through the Bible. By rejecting the truth of the Bible, the human world will become an aimless, drifting ship. On the flip side, if the people continue to come to God and accept the Bible as God's word, they will enjoy the everlasting blessing He promised.

Today’s scripture from Psalms verses 33–37 introduces God so clearly. He is the one who controls life and death. The Lord made rivers dry up completely and stopped springs from flowing (v. 33). On the contrary, the Lord changed deserts into pools of water (v. 34).

God is the only one who has had the power to operate in this way throughout the whole human history. Disbelief in Him is the most severe sin we can commit. However, when we choose to believe in Him and obey Him, it is His great joy.

Those very saints in Thessalonica Church accepted the gospel that Paul brought them as the real message from God. They were able to experience the ways of joy, life, truth, and power through it.

When our maps and GPS were useless in the desert, what guided Euni and me down the right path toward our home were the lights of Borrego town. The word of God in the Bible is the light that leads us to everlasting life in the present dark world.

God enables us to harvest the abundant fruits of life and faith through our thanksgiving. I want to close my sermon by introducing the poetry of the hymn titled “Thanks to God for My Redeemer.” The

words were written by August Ludvig Storm. Although it may vary slightly depending on the translation, Johnson uses the word "thanks" a total of 24–25 times throughout this hymn, 8 times in each verse.

Indeed, he seems to have been counting with his fingers the terms of his gratitude. It is my prayer that this November and the rest of our lives will be filled with our gratitude to the Lord.

1. Thanks to God for my Redeemer, Thanks for all Thou dost provide!
Thanks for times now but a memory, Thanks for Jesus by my side!
Thanks for pleasant, balmy springtime, Thanks for dark and stormy fall!
Thanks for tears by now forgotten, Thanks for peace within my soul!
2. Thanks for prayers that Thou hast answered, Thanks for what Thou dost deny!
Thanks for storms that I have weathered, Thanks for all Thou dost supply!
Thanks for pain, and thanks for pleasure, Thanks for comfort in despair!
Thanks for grace that none can measure, Thanks for love beyond compare!
3. Thanks for roses by the wayside, Thanks for thorns their stems contain!
Thanks for home and thanks for fireside, Thanks for hope, that sweet refrain!
Thanks for joy and thanks for sorrow, Thanks for heav'nly peace with Thee!
Thanks for hope in the tomorrow, Thanks through all eternity! Amen.

****Reflection and Application for Today's Sermon:**

- 1) Over the next week, take time to count the blessings you have received from the Lord each day, and observe how the number of blessings increases.
- 2) Today's scripture, Psalm 107:33–37, acknowledges God's transformative power, as He turns rivers into deserts and, conversely, transforms deserts into springs of water. Let's meditate on how He can change the troubling memories that may hinder your sense of gratitude.
- 3) The gospel was preached by Paul, yet the Thessalonians recognized it as the word of the Creator. Let's read and meditate on 1 Thessalonians, chapters 4 and 5, and reflect on which parts of it bring a sense of gratitude to your heart.