

Sunday Service Sermons

21 November 2021

The Secret of Thanksgiving

Can we say: the secret of being Thankful?

Glenn Stanford had a sermon title one year as: Thanks Living.

The point being that we should be thankful always, not just once a year.

We should live with an attitude of gratitude.

Even when it is hard.

When we do not feel like we are thankful, we offer the sacrifice of praise.

Praise and thanksgiving is the way a Christian is to live their lives.

Praise to God Almighty and thankfulness for all his benefits.

Text: "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever". *Ps 107:1*

The *Psalms* are a source of song and praise, and along with the Lord's Prayer, the pattern for our most earnest and joyful prayers.

When I came here as pastor there was a person in attendance who did not like the *Psalms*.

They saw them as more laments than praise.

I love the *Psalms*.

They are real life struggles in the midst of faith in the Lord God Almighty.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer learned much about prayer in his courageous struggle against Nazi Germany.

He insisted that Christians cannot really learn to pray unless they come to the *Psalms*.

He considered it a dangerous error "to think that the heart can pray by itself. For then we confuse wishes, hopes, sighs, laments, rejoicing, all of which the heart can do by itself, with prayer, we can confuse earth and heaven, man and God".

Prayer does not mean simply to pour out one's heart.

It means to find the way to God and speak with him, whether the heart is full or empty.

The *Psalms* are full of the range of human emotions, all offered to God in prayer.

In the *Psalms* before us, the prayer is one of joyous thanksgiving to the Lord.

In this text we will discover the secret of thanksgiving.

The first secret to thanksgiving is that we are able to do the following.

Celebrate the goodness of God.

God's goodness is illustrated in different ways throughout the *Psalms*.

God delivered them from their distress.

He satisfied the thirsty and filled the hungry with good things.

He brought them out of darkness and gloom, and broke their bonds asunder.

He healed the sick and delivered his people from destruction.

When sailors in bitter distress, staggering like drunken men on ships buffeted by mighty storms, cried out to the Lord, he made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed.

God raises up the needy out of affliction.

The people of God are called to be thankful to a God who is good.

The joy of thanksgiving to a good God is too much for a solo voice.

It requires choirs of people.

So this psalm is sung as well as prayed by the congregation.

The Lord is good.

Let his people praise his name.

The second secret to thanksgiving is to do the following:

Focus on the main issues of life.

The Psalmist painted four pictures of people who have been forced to consider the main issues in life.

First, there are travelers who lost their way in the desert wilderness.

They circled in a desert where there were no familiar landmarks.

Alone, hungry, and thirsty, they were ready to give up when they called to the Lord, and he led them by a straight way, till they reached a city to dwell in.

The second picture is of captives who suffer in terrible prisons, covered by darkness and bound in irons.

The third window through which we view the extremity of life reveals those who are sick and barely able to keep out of the grave.

Though all sickness is not a result of sin, sinful ways do bring deadly ills.

The fourth description of terror, is of sailors who are helpless before a relentless storm.

The Jews were not known for their prowess at sea.

Indeed, the sea was a special terror to the Hebrews.

In these illustrations the psalmist reminds us of the primary issues in life.

A person may complain of not having expensive shoes to wear until he sees someone who has no feet.

Another person may complain of not being admitted to a prestigious university until they meet a child who is mentally challenged.

Thanksgiving wells up in the hearts of men, women, and children who know the difference between necessities and luxuries, and who have learned to be grateful for the basic joys of life.

The New Testament gives its own word of grace to those trapped in the despair described in the four pictures of this *psalm*.

For the lost travelers in the desert, Jesus is both the Shepherd and the Way.

For captives in dark prisons, Jesus is the one who gives deliverance to the captives.

For those who are sick, Jesus is the Great Physician who cares for the sick and heals those who come to him.

For those at sea who fear for their lives, Jesus is the one who spoke to the storm, "Peace, be still".

A man named Butch Summers was buried under tons of rubble in Joplin, Missouri when the building he was working on collapsed.

He found himself in a two-foot-high cavity where he spent three and a half days pounding on a pipe and praying, while he hoped someone would hear and rescue him.

At times he thought that he might not make it but he knew that if anyone could get him out alive it had to be Jesus.

He was rescued and lived to share his story.

When the world caves in on us we cry out to the Lord in our distress, and he hears us.

The secret of thanksgiving is partly discerned when we face trouble and realize that all things are not equally important.

When the basics of life are provided, then is the time for great thanksgiving.

The third secret to thanksgiving is to remember the source of our help.

Although Summers did not claim to be a religious man, he did know the source of his help.

He knew that if anyone could get him out alive, it had to be Jesus.

The people of Israel understood that God was the source of their strength and deliverance.

He had brought them out of bondage; he had led them through the wilderness; he would bring them safely home.

If we are to be thankful, we must remember from whom the blessings flow.

A man who sought to maintain an atheistic viewpoint confessed that he came to a time when he began to believe in God.

This came as a result of not knowing who to thank when he delighted in the joy of life, the beauty of a dawn, the glory of the birth of a child, the love in the eyes of his wife.

On reflection he had to admit to himself that the astonishing joy of life was so magnificent that nothing less than God could have made it possible.

He had a desire to say thank you, and only God was worthy of gratitude.

The fourth secret to thanksgiving is to take time for gratitude.

After God's deliverance of the people they took time to be grateful.

We have often wondered with some amazement that of the ten lepers whom Jesus healed, only one returned to say thank you.

We are often guilty of the same carelessness.

When we do not give thanksgiving it is sometimes because we simply are not willing to do so.

On an autumn night in 1860, a steamboat broke up and sank in Lake Michigan one mile from the village of Winnetka, Ill.

Of the 393 passengers aboard the Lady Elgin, 279 drowned.

Of the 114 survivors, 17 were saved by Edward Spencer, a student at Northwestern University.

Spencer was a strong swimmer, but after having made seventeen round trips, he became delirious from the strain.

It was reported that he asked again and again, "Did I do my best?"

As a result of that night, Spence became sick and was confined to a wheelchair the rest of his life.

Some years later, on Spencer's birthday, a reporter asked him his most vivid memory of that heroic date in his life.

His answer, "I remember that not one of the seventeen returned to thank me".

The secret to being thankful is simple.

First you must be open to the goodness of God.

Second, you must be willing to focus on what really matters.

Third, you must remember where your help originates.

And fourth, you must be willing to take time to say thank you.

Now you know the secret.

Knowing this, you can turn every day into Thanksgiving Day.

As long as I have breath, I will thank the Lord!

And when I no longer have breath I will be with Him forevermore!

Praise God from Whom!