

REASON ENOUGH TO BE THANKFUL

Selected Scriptures

INTRODUCTION

➔ Illustration - A Handful of Thorns (from Our Daily Bread – Oct 10, 2008)
Jeremy Taylor was a 17th-century English cleric who was severely persecuted for his faith. But though his house was plundered, his family left destitute, and his property confiscated, he continued to count the blessings he could not lose.

He wrote: "They have not taken away my merry countenance, my cheerful spirit, and a good conscience; they have still left me with the providence of God, and all His promises ... my hopes of Heaven, and my charity to them, too, and still I sleep and digest, I eat and drink, I read and meditate. And he that has so many causes of joy, and so great should never choose to sit down upon his little handful of thorns."

(expand briefly on the idea of a handful of thorns)

Someone has said, "A disposition of continual thankfulness comes from an unshakable confidence in God's wisdom, power, and goodness no matter what our circumstances may be. People who possess the quality of gratitude may be poor in this world's goods, but they are truly rich spiritually. Some of the most appreciative people around are people who have little material wealth, and some even live below the poverty line. Charles Dickens, in one of his stories, has a character say, 'My not knowing at one meal where I shall get the next is a great help to thankfulness.'"

Gratitude is important – what do we have to be grateful for?

There are so many things we can be thankful for, especially as Christians. As you look through the Word of God you will find a great many references to the idea of giving thanks. You also find many examples of people giving thanks to God for His goodness. In fact, while it is important to give thanks for the good things we have – family, health, homes, etc. I believe it is even more important to recognize and give thanks for the spiritual blessings we have from the hand of God.

It is that approach that I would like to take in our thanksgiving message today. I thought it would be worthwhile to look at just a few of the things for which the Scriptures remind us to thank God. I just did a quick search in the word for the phrase "Thanks be to God..." and similar statements. This is what I came up with...

I. For God's Gift of Salvation - 2 Cor. 9:15

2 Cor 9:15 – "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!"

What is this indescribable gift? The Bible mentions several times the gift of God.

John 3:16 – "For God so loved the world that He **gave** his only Son..."

Eph. 2:8 – "It is by grace you have been saved and that not of yourselves, it is the **gift of God**..."

Rom. 6:23 – "The wages of sin... but the **gift of God** is eternal life..."

Rom. 5:15-18 - *look up and read*

I think these passages make it clear that the indescribable gift Paul is talking about is the gift of eternal life which comes through Jesus Christ. It is His gift of salvation.

Have you received that indescribable gift? Have you thanked Him for it recently?

II. For Victory over Sin in our Lives - Rom. 7:25

Look up Rom 7. *Read v. 25* –

Discuss the context of this verse - The two natures - the struggle between the heart which wants to please God and the flesh which has the desire to sin.

v. 24 - It is thought by some commentators that there is an allusion here to a horrible mode of punishment mentioned by ancient writers, by which the criminal condemned to death was fastened by chains to a dead body and left to die in the presence of a putrefying corpse.

How can we ever get victory? How can we ever be set free from this sinful nature which seeks to destroy us?

v. 25 - The only way to freedom is through Jesus Christ and the victory He has won for us at Calvary.

Have you thanked the Lord recently for victory over sin? For the fact that you do not have to live your life as a slave to the sinful habits that destroy people?

III. For Using Us to Spread His Word - 2 Cor. 2:14

2 Cor. 2:14 – “But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him.”

Discuss the verses following - God can use you and me to present an aroma to the world to draw people to Christ.

IV. For making us fit to share in His Kingdom - Col. 1:12

Col 1:12 – “Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.”

Do you know what the standard is for being a resident of Heaven? Have you ever considered what is required to be a part of God's Kingdom? Yet He is willing to make us fit and qualified for that. That should make us give thanks.

V. For Fellow Believers who Impact our Lives - Eph 1:16 and others

Do you ever give thanks for those who have made a difference in your life?

- Eph 1:16 – “I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.”
- Phil 1:3 – “I thank my God every time I remember you.”
- Col 1:3 – “We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you,”
- 1 Thess 1:2 – “We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers.”

We usually think of Paul as the one who influenced them and made a difference in their lives, yet he was grateful for all these people, because of the impact they had had on his life. Paul often mentioned in his letters individuals who had helped him and encouraged him and made a difference in his life.

Shouldn't we give thanks for those who have impacted our lives?

VI. For final victory in Jesus Christ - 1 Cor. 15:57, Rev. 11:17

1 Cor 15:57 – “But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Future victory is assured by the return of Christ. Go through verses 51-57, focusing on the questions in v. 55, the explanation in v. 56, and then the answer in v. 57

Death is not the victor; in fact death is really our victory when we are released from this body of sin.

➔ Illustration - WHEN DEATH IS GAIN

Believers in every age have experienced confidence in their final moments on earth. For example, William Anderson of Dallas had been ill with an incurable disease. Although he had rallied and seemed to be some better, he knew in his heart that his time to leave this earth was near. So, calling his mother to come closer to his bed, he whispered, “I want to tell you something. In spite of what the doctors are saying, I'm going to get to Heaven before you do.” Then, smiling peacefully, he shut his eyes, and within a few minutes his soul had winged its way to Glory. Because Anderson's faith was fixed on Jesus, fear was banished, and he joyfully anticipated going to be with the Lord.

That victory will become reality when Christ returns and we are raised with that new glorified body to reign with Him. Then we will experience our full redemption, spirit, soul and body.

In the book of Revelation, when the saints of all the ages gather around the throne of God in heaven we read,

“And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, “We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign.” (Revelation 11:16-17 ESV)

At that time our victory will be complete. What a day that will be. Have you thanked Him that He has won the final victory over sin, death and every enemy? Are you looking forward to the day when we will experience that victory in all of its fullness?

Conclusion

Thanksgiving is a time to give thanks for many things. We've looked at few Scriptural or spiritual causes for thanksgiving this morning. What we have really seen in three of them, at least, is a picture of our salvation.

- That indescribable gift - salvation - spirit made alive in Christ
- Victory over sin – power to live - soul renewed
- Final victory in Christ - Glory - Body glorified

There you have the three elements of salvation – past, present, future – justification, sanctification, and glorification.

Have you thanked Him recently for your salvation? What about all the other spiritual blessings in heavenly places which are ours in Christ - the privilege of being used by Him in service, the blessing of being made fit to share in His kingdom, for fellow believers who impact our lives?

Refer back to opening illustration – “A Handful of Thorns”

Let's take time to reflect this Thanksgiving Day on God's goodness.