

A Lost Art

November 24, 2011

Giving thanks is becoming a lost art. In our selfish “Me-First” society, we’re so used to trying to get what we want; when we want that we take a lot of things for granted – including God’s goodness, kindness, and faithfulness. As a result, we often forfeit our joy because we’ve forgotten how to be truly thankful to the Lord.

When was the last time you knelt before God – physically or spiritually – to offer up thanksgiving and nothing else? When was the last time you heard someone else do this? It’s easy to understand why the world doesn’t see much joy reflected in Christianity today. We’ve quit practicing the art of thanksgiving; and without it, joy will remain a very scarce commodity.

But then again, it is not only limited to the people in the United States, but also it has been that way since the beginning of mankind – Adam and Eve. I believe that it is human selfish nature that we expect others to take care of our needs and we don’t consider letting them know how much we appreciate their effort for us.

A couple of days ago, Our Daily Bread contained a quote from a British author Gladys Stern. She once said, “Silent gratitude isn’t much use to anyone.” I like that. The whole reason for saying thanks is to let the giver of a gift know how much you appreciate their gift – though it may not be important to you.

I heard a pastor who told me that he doesn’t compliment his church volunteers for their work because he doesn’t want to rob their blessings in heaven. I think that he misunderstood the meaning of the text. It is not the compliment from others that rob one’s blessings, rather one’s motive for his work to the Lord.

A. WHAT HAPPENED TO THE REST?

Luke 17:11-19 Now it happened as He went to Jerusalem that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. 12 Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. 13 And they lifted up their voices and said, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” 14 So when He saw them, He said to them, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed. 15 And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, 16 and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. 17 So Jesus answered and said, “Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? 18 Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?” 19 And He said to him, “Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well.”

As we learned that the Jews and Samaritans would not normally get along, but misery loves company because all ten were outcasts.

Originally there were ten lepers who lifted up their voices and begged to Jesus for His healings. While they were on the way to the priests in faith in Jesus and obedience to His command, they realized that they were healed. Nine of them went on their ways to wherever they wanted to go. But only one former leper came back to the Lord and thanked Him.

The nine who had walked away unthankful were men of Jesus’ own country, Israel. They should have known better. The one man who remembered to return and give

praise to God was a Samaritan, despised by the Jewish people of that day. Even so, when this Samaritan leper was healed, he knew in his heart he had to do something.

A few days ago, I was talking with a friend of mine about thanking the Lord for His kindness and faithfulness to all of us. I said, "When the things around us go well, somehow we have a tendency to think that it has something to do with us and we take credits for it; but when the things in our lives go haywire, many of us tend to blame God and declare that it is His fault for allowing them to happen to us regardless what we might have done to cause that consequence."

"Were there not ten cleansed?" asked Jesus. The recent census tells us that we have over 7 billion people on this earth. Can you guess how many people thank the Lord for what He did on the cross; how He provides food for us; how He protects us from all the harms? Can you guess far less than ten out of one hundred might give thanks to the Lord on a regular basis? I wouldn't be one bit surprised.

The majority of the population around the world is against the Lord. No one can say, "I don't need God. I came to this world all by myself." Yet, he doesn't realize that his very life depends on God's mercy. God could easily say, "You are no more," and that would be the end of him. Because all of us owe Him the very existence of ourselves whether we admit it or not.

B. YOU ARE NO MORE

This reminds me another person who thought that he was it and boasted about it. Actually, he didn't have a chance to finish his boasting, because the Lord took care of him on the spot.

Daniel 4:29-33 At the end of the twelve months he was walking about the royal palace of Babylon. 30 The king spoke, saying, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?" 31 While the word was still in the king's mouth, a voice fell from heaven: "King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! 32 And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses." 33 That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws.

Previously God warned king Nebuchadnezzar through a dream interpreted by his chief counselor, Daniel, that because he failed to acknowledge his dependence on God, God would bring him low, making him like a beast in the field. A year passed and nothing happened. The king probably had forgotten the dream, or had decided that he was in no danger of divine judgment or he was too mighty and too good for any punishment from God. Then one day he went up to the heights of his palace and surveyed his capital city, Babylon. Humanly speaking, Nebuchadnezzar had every reason to be proud.

Basking in his own accomplishment, the words of his boasting filled his mouth, but not quite finished. The Lord finished the sentence for the king who thought that he was the king of kings.

But what happened when Nebuchadnezzar boasted in himself and failed to thank God for his achievements? The judgment that God had foretold a year before immediately fell upon him. His mind was filled with the mad delusion that he was a beast, and for seven years he went about on all fours, seeking to feed himself by grazing grass, and he allowed his beard and nails to grow as if they were fur and claws.

It is very possible that America will come to a similar fate. As a nation we neglect to give thanks to God and instead we boast in ourselves. God has patiently withheld judgment, giving us a chance to repent. But His patience will not restrain judgment forever.

When it comes to making prayer requests to the Lord, we are very diligent and quick. But when it comes to giving thanks to the Lord for the answers to our prayer requests, that is another story. Should I say, we often forget and neglect?

C. MUCH IS GIVEN, MUCH WILL BE REQUIRED

Luke 12:48 But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.

What does that say to us? In approaching God to ask for new blessings, we should never forget to return thanks for the many blessings already given!

And as we think about the many answers to prayer we've already received, our faith grows bolder and bolder. We are reminded in the depths of our soul that "Nothing is too hard for the Lord!"

Here is a very important reason we ought to give thanks to the Lord. It is because as we remind ourselves of God's power, kindness, and faithfulness to us through the years, it strengthens our faith. Giving thanks may not immediately lift us out of our circumstances, but it can lift us above them, so that we are no longer under their control.

Let's be practical here. A sincere "Thank you" should always be on our lips. When we start to use heartfelt phrases such as "Thank You, Jesus," "Thank You, my Lord," or "Thank You, Father," showing our gratitude to a brother, a sister, a spouse, a parent, a child, a neighbor, a clerk at the store, a person on the street would come much easier.

D. THE THINGS TO REMEMBER

Three things will help us remember to give God thanks for the remainder of this year and future:

1) I must realize that as a Christian, God is in control of all circumstances surrounding my life, both good and bad.

Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

2) I must realize that God loves me and is always looking out for my benefit – both in this life and in the life to come.

2 Corinthians 4:17-18 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, 18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.

For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

3) I must realize God is wiser than I am. He is always dealing with me for my best eternal good.

I always want what's best for my immediate good, but what immediately seems good is not always eternally good.

Take the time to give thanks to God for what He has done for you. Not just now, but throughout the day, throughout this week, this month, this year and the rest of your life. For the Christian, every day should be Thanksgiving.

On this afternoon, before you glue yourself in front of a television, before you stuff yourself more than the bird you are about to have, let us remember our Savior and Lord Jesus. Let our crucified and risen God Jesus Christ transform this Thanksgiving Day into a holy day which reminds us to thank Him in all circumstances.

So have a Happy Thanksgiving and God bless you guys.