

“Gratitude”

Deuteronomy 8:7-18, Psalm 100, Ephesians 1:15-23, John 3:16

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Perhaps you have heard the story about the family having a picnic by a lake on a beautiful sunny afternoon. They all got so busy eating and having a good time that they lost track of their five-year-old, and, in a moment of carelessness, the child fell off a pier into the water. A brisk wind pushed their child further and further out into the lake. Unfortunately, none of them could swim, so as the child bobbed up and down they stood by helplessly, shrieking their heads off. Fortunately, a passerby heard their cry and plunged into the lake, swam out to the little boy and managed to grab him before he went under for the third time. Heroically, the passerby paddled back to shore where, before he collapsed with exhaustion, he presented the child to his mother safe and sound. The mother embraced her son with hugs, kisses and tears of joy. Then she took a good look at her son, turned to his rescuer and said, "Where's his cap?"

Moses urged the Israelites to be grateful. Moses reminded them of how God rescued them from slavery. Moses advises, take time to celebrate and be grateful. Moses tells them and us not to fool ourselves into thinking the land we have inherited and the life we enjoy is our doing. God has, is and will continue to rescue us. God gives us everything. Life is complex. It is easy to keep striving, keep doing, keep reaching with so much focus that we do not take time to be grateful, to say thank you to God and others. Sometimes we are so focused on ourselves, our circumstances, our next step we skip over gratitude and rush into the next matter. In essence we're saying "Where's his cap?"

Moses said **Deuteronomy 8:7-18** **“For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron and from whose hills you may mine copper. You shall eat your fill and bless the LORD your God for the good land that God has given you. Take care that you do not forget the LORD your God, by failing to keep God’s commandments, God’s ordinances, and God’s statutes, which I am commanding you today. When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid wasteland with poisonous snakes and scorpions. God made water flow for you from flint rock, and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good. Do not say to yourself, "My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth." But remember the LORD your God, for it is God who gives you power to get wealth, so that God may confirm God’s covenant that God swore to your ancestors, as God is doing today.”**

A minister got on a train at Victoria Station in London and happened to be seated in a compartment across from two men he did not know. They exchanged pleasantries. The minister discovered they were both transplanted Americans, one having lived in England for several years, the other only recently arrived. About ten minutes after they pulled out of the station one of the men was shaken by an epileptic seizure. His eyes rolled back in his head. His whole body trembled. He rolled off the seat and tumbled to the floor, shook violently and uncontrollably. His companion quickly picked him up and gently placed him back on the seat. He took off his overcoat and

wrapped it around him like a blanket. He rolled up a napkin and put it in his friend's mouth to keep him from biting his tongue. And then, as if wiping the tears of a child, he lovingly blotted the beads of perspiration on his friend's forehead. After a few minutes the seizure loosened its grip and the stricken man fell immediately into a deep sleep. When the other man had settled his friend comfortably he turned to the minister and said, "I'm sorry you had to see that. You'll have to forgive us. He doesn't have these seizures very often, but we never know when they're going to strike him." The minister assured him it was OK, and then the man began telling his story. "We were in Vietnam together," he said. "We were both wounded at the same time. I lost a leg," he said, pointing to his right leg. "This is an artificial leg, but I've learned to walk on it pretty well. But my friend here had chest wounds from the grenade. There was shrapnel all through his chest, and every time he moved he just about passed out from the pain." Now, the helicopter that was coming to pick us up was blown out of the sky by an enemy rocket, so we knew there was no hope of being pulled out of there, at least not any time soon. So my friend here somehow got to his hands and knees. He winced in pain with every move he made, but he managed to grab hold of my shirt and drag me through the jungle. I told him, 'Just give up on me. Save yourself if you can. There's no way you're going to get us both out of this mess.' And I kept on like that until he said, "I will never abandon you here." I don't know how he did it. He pulled me out of that mess. He saved my life. After the war we kept up with each other, even after he moved here to England. And about a year ago I found out he had been diagnosed with epilepsy and somebody had to be with him all the time. So I sold my house, sold my car, and came over here to take care of him. I hope you understand." And the minister said, "Not only do I understand, I'm impressed." The man replied, don't be impressed. I am grateful, after what he did for me, there isn't anything I wouldn't do for him."

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that God gave Jesus, so that everyone who believes in Jesus will not perish but have eternal life." Jesus took on human flesh endured suffering, betrayal and the agony of crucifixion to pull you and me out of our mess.

Billy Graham said, "I am convinced one of the joys of heaven will be discovering the hidden ways that God, in God's sovereignty, acted in our lives on earth to protect us and guide us so as to bring glory to God's name, in spite of our frailty. As I look back over the years, however, I know that my deepest feeling is one of overwhelming gratitude. I cannot take credit for whatever God had chosen to accomplish through us and our ministry; only God deserves the glory, and we can never thank God enough for the great things God has done."

Paris Donehoo said, "Gratitude is not a matter of following instructions. Gratitude is a matter of following the heart. Thankfulness is no mathematics. Thankfulness is art. Thankfulness is not a set of plans. Thankfulness is a lump in the throat, a catch in the voice, a trembling in the knees, a shout of ecstasy, a whisper of awe. Gratitude can not be analyzed, evaluated or manufactured. So this Thanksgiving season," Paris "won't tell you to feel guilty for all the times you could have been grateful and weren't." Paris suggests that you cultivate your heart, that you feed your soul, get in touch with your emotions, stand in awe before mystery, for gratitude is a matter of following the heart.

The psalmist prayed a prayer of gratitude. **Psalm 100 "Shout with joy to the Lord, all the earth! Worship the Lord with gladness. Come before God, singing with joy. Acknowledge that the Lord is God! God made us, and we are God's. We are God's people, the sheep of God's pasture. Enter God's gates with thanksgiving; go into God's courts with praise. Give thanks to God and praise God's name. For the Lord is good. God's unfailing love continues forever, and God's faithfulness continues to each generation."**

After reflecting on Psalm 100 Walter Brueggemann said, "Obviously our world is at the edge of insanity and we with it. Inhumaneness is developed as a scientific enterprise. Greed is celebrated as economic advance. Power runs unbridled to destructiveness. In a world like this one, our psalm is an act of sanity, whereby we may be "re clothed in our rightful minds. ... Life is no longer self-grounded without thanks but rooted in thanks."

The Apostle Paul's heart overflowed with gratitude so much so that even while in prison Paul expressed his gratitude to others and God. Paul wrote. **Ephesians 1:15-23 I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know Jesus, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which God has called you, what are the riches of God's glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of God's power for us who believe, according to the working of God's great power. God put this power to work in Christ when God raised Jesus from the dead and seated Jesus at God's right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And God has put all things under God's feet and has made Jesus the head over all things for the church, which is Jesus' body, the fullness of Jesus who fills all in all.**

The Apostle Paul begins with gratitude for the readers of his letter, a blessing of affirmation, thanksgiving for our faith and love. Paul invites us to increase our attention, to see the work of God in people's lives, our life and in the world. Paul invites us to be grateful for God's power which is far superior to any challenge, including death. Paul knows how easy it is to be anxious, afraid, a prisoner to the world and to guilt. Paul invites us to shift our focus from the mess, to Jesus who has, is and will save us. Paul invites us to pray prayers of gratitude for others and God instead of praying about our problems; Prayers of thanksgiving for the passerby who rescued the child, instead of prayers for the lost hat to be found; Prayers of thanksgiving for the man who pulled his companion to safety, instead of prayers for his leg, his home, his car, his comfort. Paul's declaration that Christ is the head of the church, that God's glory will fill the world, puts everything else in proper perspective. Grateful prayer for what God is doing in our lives causes our problems to lose their centrality. Our problems do not disappear, however we can be certain that in time all problems will be solved by Jesus our Savior. A hymn declares, "The things of earth grow strangely dim in the light of God's glory and grace." Paul concludes his prayer of gratitude with the phrase, "the fullness of Jesus who fills all in all". God's fullness, completeness, wholeness will fill you. God's joy, grace, peace, love and glory will fill you and all the cosmos. Paul wants us to believe that our mess has already been cleaned up by Jesus, even though it does not look like it yet. Paul invites us to have a grateful heart so we can see how God is at work saving us and the entire cosmos. We are invited to discover the joy of moving from a "Where is his cap?" life to a, "I am grateful for God saving me!" life. *Amen*