

11/20/11

**Series Title:** *Thanksgiving Day Message*

**Today's Title:**

“Give Thanks with a Grateful Heart”

Scripture Reading and Text: Psalm 138

**Introduction:** [see Maria's e-mail to Sandy]

“I do not know if you remember Bill Simms, but Bill raped me; I was 15. Mom sent me to Manteca, Ca. where I lived with long-time family friends. That was my Junior year and that's how mom wanted to handle it without causing a lot of trouble for Millie and her family. I told Mom I did not want to live there as I was afraid. I was in class one day and over the intercom I heard that Maria Dunn was called to the Principal's office. While walking down the hall I saw Ellis, he was the dad of where I was living, and I knew something was wrong. He took me home and Verna, the mom, told me that my Dad had passed away two days before his 40<sup>th</sup> birthday. *I had planned to go up that weekend for his birthday; instead, it was for his funeral. He died in May: I was 16.*

I was going to a church at that time. I attended a youth rally in Quincy, and that is where I met Earny. He was 24 and I was 16.

Mom did not come to my graduation - she said she had to work. Wanda, the lady and family I was staying with told me that I could go to school, get a job, or get married. I did not know where I would live if I took the first two options because I had no opportunities. I decided to go and see Earny and ask if he still wanted to marry me. He said yes, so on

Sept. 14<sup>th</sup>, after I turned 18 and he was 24, we got married. After one week after the wedding I wanted out, so I went and talked to the minister and he said, “too bad, once you’re married, you’re married.” I was so confused. I stayed in the marriage for 25 years, then filed for divorce. The kids were grown and I could not take the mental abuse anymore. For several years we still did things together with the grandkids, and the other day I was talking with Social Security and found out the divorce was never final, so on Sept. 14<sup>th</sup> we were married 38 years. He was really sick for the last 3 and a half years in a nursing home. I always cared about him – just did not love him the way I needed to, was tired of being hurt all the time.

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This last year has been one of the hardest with loosing Mom in February, then Earny this September.

I went to medical assisting in 1996, got a job at Kaiser Hospital, was doing well, then fell off a step-stool in my bedroom and broke my back. I have had 4 major back surgeries; two this last year. My first one in Oregon was a failed back surgery. I have rods and screws now, and in March this year after major back surgery, I fell in my kitchen and fractured a disc above all the previous surgery. Since February I have had total knee replacement, then in June I broke both wrists and have not been able to dress myself.

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P.S. *After all these years I am still serving God, which I would never change....I serve a big God and know that we have not because we ask not, and I am asking in faith, believing that God will meet the need....Once again, thanks to both of you for instilling in me the importance to live for God and your love and examples that you lived....Take care. God bless! Love, Maria*

**Premise:** *A grateful heart is a God-gifted responsibility*

**Outline:**

**I. Reasons for Giving Thanks**

**II. Responses of Giving Thanks**

**III. Results of Giving Thanks**

**I. REASONS FOR GIVING THANKS**

**A. For God's steadfast love**

v.2

c/w John 1:14-18

- Charles Haddon Spurgeon

“It is upon these two points that the name of Jehovah is at this time assailed – his grace and his truth. He is said to be too stern, too terrible, and therefore “modern thought” displaces the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and sets up an effeminate deity of its own making. As for us, we firmly believe that God is love, and that in the summing up of all things it will

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*be seen that hell itself is not inconsistent with the beneficence of Jehovah, but is, indeed, a necessary part of his moral government now that sin has intruded into the universe. True believers hear the thunders of his justice, and yet they do not doubt his lovingkindness. Especially do we delight in God's great love to his own elect, such as he showed to Israel as a race, and more especially to David and his seed when he entered into covenant with him. Concerning this there is*

abundant room for praise.”

**B. For God's faithfulness**

v.2

1. Illustration from Knight, p.120

The cheetah is one of the swiftest of all animals. It has been clocked running at a speed of 70 miles an hour. One of the most interesting things about the cheetah is this. At mealtime, the cheetah singles out one animal among the grazing herd. Then the chase begins! Along the chase may be other animals which the cheetah could easily seize. Nothing, however, can detract or turn the cheetah aside from his one fixed purpose- the catching of the creature he initially set his eyes on to capture for himself.

2. Francis Thompson, *Hound of Heaven*

In Francis Thompson's *Hound of Heaven*, compare the intensity and faithful pursuit by God of those He has claimed to be His own by faithful grace and mercy.

*I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;  
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;*

*I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways*

*Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears*

*I hid from Him, and under running laughter.*

*Up vistaed hopes I sped;*

*And shot, precipitated,*

*A down Titanic glooms of chasmed fears,*

*From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.*

*But with unhurrying chase,*

*And unperturbed pace,*

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*Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,  
They beat – and a Voice beat*

*More instant than the Feet –*

‘All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.’

3. *Perfect Illustrations*, p.54

Momma eagles are caring and loving creatures. Somewhere down the line the momma eagle decides her little eagle needs to learn to fly. So she takes the little eagle out of the nest and flies up as high as she can go. At this point, she drops the fledgling, and he falls fast. The fledgling has never flown in his life. The ground is coming up, his heart is ready to burst, and he knows there is no way he is going to survive.

But the momma eagle is watching, and at the last moment she swoops down and catches the baby eagle. Relieved, the baby eagle thinks, *I'm saved, I'm fine, I'm gonna survive*. The momma eagle then flies up as high as she can go and again drops him. She continues to do this until he learns to fly.

The Lord bore the Israelites on eagle's wings. When they didn't have any water, He swooped down and provided water for them. When they came to the Red Sea, He provided for them. When they didn't have any food, He swooped down and provided manna for them.

*C. For God's name and His word*

v.2c

- John Murray, p.407, *Enc. of Chr. Quotations*

“The ethic of the Bible reflects the character of the God of the Bible. Remove from Scripture the transcendent holiness, right-ousness and truth of God and its ethic disappears.”

[from Bibl. Illustr., p.289]

Question: How does God magnify His Word?

1. By making it the power of God in conversion of the

soul. *“The only voice that can calm and inspire hope is the voice that sounds from Calvary out of God’s written Word.”*

2. By making it a sanctifying Word. *“Nothing but this*

*will make them holy and fit for heaven. The philoso-*

*phies and teachings of men never did and cannot do it.”*

3. By making it a comforting a edifying Word. *“It is the Christian’s solace. It helps him over life’s rough way.*

*It is food, and drink, and shelter to him in his pilgrim-*

*age. It sweetens every cup. It kindles hope*

and assur-

ance as the end draws nigh. It lights up the death

chamber and puts the words of victory on the lips of

the departing saint.”

**D. For answering us when we call upon Him**

v.3a

- Vernal E. Simms, senior pastor of Morris Brown

A.M.E. Church in Philadelphia (quoted in *Perfect*

Illustrations, pp.249-250)

*I grew up in a rough Boston housing project called Columbia Point in a family of 9 children. Although I'd been a hardwork-ing student, paying for college seemed impossible. But my mother's favorite expression was "Pray, and the Lord will make a way somehow." I viewed that as good advice for other people. But when I decided to go to college and seminary be-cause I believed the Lord had a call upon my life, I had no other choice!*

I packed for college and even went to orientation, but still didn't have any money. I'd have to pack up my belongings and make the 100 mile trip back home. But an heir to a corporate fortune heard about my plight and paid for my college and seminary education. After I graduated, I went to my benefactor's office to thank him for all he had done for me and asked him what I could do to pay him back.

Imagine my saying to a multimillionaire, “What can I do to repay you?” The man responded, “Help somebody.” I’ve spent the last 20 years in the ministry with that goal in mind. I’ve pastured in the drug-ridden, crime-infested inner city as well as well-manicured suburbs. And I’ve learned that the blessing of God is like a boomerang. As I’ve tried to help somebody, the Lord has blessed me.

**E. For increasing the strength of my soul**

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v.3b

c/w I Samuel 30:1-6 “*But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.*”

- Richard Sibbes, Vol. 5, p.442

“A liberty and boldness with God, for ‘where the Spirit is, there is a gracious liberty;’ that is, further enlargements from the law, guilt of sin, and the fear of the wrath of God, that we can come with some boldness to his throne and to him as our Father; a freedom to open our souls in prayer before him. This stands not so much in multitude of words, or forms of expressions, but a son-like boldness in our approaches in prayer. The hypocrite, especially in extremity, cannot pray; his conscience stops his mouth. But where the Spirit seals, it gives this liberty, freely to open and spread our case before him and call upon him....”

**F. Though the Lord is exalted, He regards the lowly**

v.6

c/w Isaiah 57:15-21

c/w James 4:6 “*But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, ‘God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’”*

c/w 1 Peter 5:5 “*Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you...”*

**G. For preserving our lives in the midst of trouble**

v.7

- Shirley Dobson in *Perfect Illustrations*, pp.216-217

When Focus on the Family was in its early stages and our children were young, my husband, Jim, was often traveling. I had grown accustomed to his absences and was never really frightened while he was away.

After all, I knew God was protecting us. Jim and I have prayed for our family throughout our marriage, and God always honored our simple trust with his protection. So even when Jim was away, I slept in peace. Except once.

One night about 2:00 a.m., I awoke with a start. I was afraid and didn't know why. For a few minutes (it seemed like hours!), I lay in bed worrying. Finally, I forced myself out of bed and sand to my knees.

"Oh, Lord," I prayed, "I don't know why I'm so frightened. I ask you to watch over our home and to protect our family. Send your guardian angel to be with us." I climbed back into bed, and in about half and hour I was able to fall back to sleep.

The next morning our teen-aged babysitter, who lived across the street, came running over. "Mrs. Dobson, did you hear what happened? A burglar robbed your next-door neighbor's house last night!"

It was true. A thief had broken in, entered the couple's bedroom while they slept and snatched the husband's wallet from a dresser. The burglar escaped with the family's vacation money, about \$500.

Then the baby-sitter told me the police had determined the time of the robbery: about 2:00 a.m., the same time I had awakened in fear!

My mind reeled at the thought. "If a burglar wanted to break into our house," I said, "he would probably try to get in through the bath-room window near our children's bedrooms. There's a hedge, and he'd be shielded from view. Let's go look."

When we walked to the window on the other side of the house, we saw that the screen was bent and the sill was splintered. Someone had indeed tried to break in!

The police later told me if the burglar had really

wanted to get in, he would have. What had happened to stop him?

I am convinced God protected us through my panicked prayer. Something - or Someone - had discouraged the burglar from entering our house.

*H. For the Lord fulfilling His purpose for us*

v.8a

- Hymn by Heginbotham #1052

*God of our lives, thy various praise  
Our voices shall resound:*

*Thy hand directs our fleeting days,*

*And brings the seasons round.*

*To thee shall grateful songs arise,*

*Our Father and our Friend,  
Whose constant mercies from the skies*

*In genial streams descend.*

*In every scene of life, thy care,  
In every age, we see;*

*And constant as thy favors are,*

*So let our praises be.*

*Still may thy love, in every scene,  
In every age, appear;*

*And let the same compassion deign*

*To bless the opening year.*

*If mercy smile, let mercy bring  
Our wandering souls to God:*

*In our affliction we shall sing,*

*If thou wilt bless the rod.*

## **II. RESPONSES OF GIVING THANKS**

### **A. Wholehearted involvement**

v.1a

- Albert Barnes

“Reserving nothing in my heart to give to idols or to other gods. All that constitutes praise to God as God, he would address to him alone. He would use no language, and cherish no feeling, which implied a belief that there was any other God; he would indulge in no attachment which would be inconsistent with supreme attachment to God, or which would tend to draw away his affections from him.”

- poem by William Cowper, pp.188-189

*How blest thy creature is, O God,  
When with a single eye,*

*He views the luster of thy word,*

*The day-spring from on high!*

*Thro' all the storms that veil the skies,*

*And frown on earthly things,  
The Sun of Righteousness he eyes,  
With healing in his wings.  
Struck by that light, the human heart,  
A barren soil no more,  
Sends the sweet smell of grace abroad,  
Where serpents lurk'd before.  
The soul, a dreary province once  
Of Satan's dark domain,  
Feels a new empire form'd within  
And owns a heav'nly reign,  
The glorious orb, whose golden beams  
The fruitful year control,  
Since first, obedient to thy word,  
He started from the goal,  
Has cheer'd the nations with the joys  
His orient beams impart;-  
But, Jesus! 'Tis thy light alone  
Can shine upon the heart.*

**B. Openly before all**

v.1b "...before the gods...."

- Justin Martyr

“No one makes us afraid or leads us into captivity as we have set our faith on Jesus. For though we are beheaded, and crucified, and exposed to beasts and chains and fire and all other forms of torture, it is plain that we do not forsake the confession of our faith, but the more things of this kind which happen to us the more are there others who become believers and truly religious through the name of Jesus.”

- Polycarp

*Eighty-six years have I served Jesus and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?”*

- John of the Cross

“Have great love for trials and think of them as but a small way of pleasing your Bridegroom, who did not hesitate to die for you.”

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- Ignatius of Antioch

“Let me be given to the wild beasts, for by their means I can attain to God. I am God’s wheat, and I am being ground by the teeth of the beasts so that I may be like pure bread.”

### **C. With singing**

v.1c

(Illustration from Nelson, p.466)

In his book, *Songs That Lift the Heart*, Gospel singer George Beverly Shea tells of his friend Burt Frizen of Wheaton, Illinois. While attending college in Wheaton, Burt distinguished himself with his fine baritone voice. But his college studies were interrupted by the war. Serving in Germany, he was seriously

wounded and lay dying for 6 hours. He passed in and out of consciousness, aware at each waking that his life was ebbing faster and faster.

To face that moment, he began singing a hymn that his mother had taught him:

*There is a name to me so dear  
Like sweetest music to my ear;*

*For when my heart is troubled, filled with fear,*

*Jesus whispers peace.*

As he sang, a German soldier came upon him, his bayonet fixed. Burt anticipated the worst but kept singing. As he sang he felt himself being lifted up. He was carried to a nearby stone ledge. There the enemy soldier left Burt unharmed. A few minutes later, he was discovered and rescued by his own medics.

**D. Bowing down in humility**

v.2a

- William Cooper in *Voices from the Past*, p.215

It is peculiar to Christians to give thanks in adversity. To praise God for blessings, others can do, but to give thanks in danger is the highest pitch of virtue: 'I do not see why I should suffer less; these things are very little compared to my sin. I deserve much more at the Lord's hands!' A Christian has taken up his cross. No loss can dis-hearten him, as the poet says: 'If the world breaks and falls about my ears, I will not be afraid.' Afflictions are for our good. They conform

us to the Lord, our chief good. They prepare us for communion with the Lord and are fatherly tokens of love. Children must submit to the rod, and kiss it too. The Lord by afflicting prevents and purges sin. Do we not thank the surgeon who removes a damaged limb? Yes, we thank him, and take our bitter pills too. The cross God lays upon us is far below what we deserve. What is a drop of sweetened worm-wood to the gall of bitterness? What is a little suffering to the lake of fire? Jesus drank the full cup of suffering for us. He drank it fully – we cannot, we need not. O thank God you have so little a share of it! In affliction we learn what we could not otherwise. Wax unheated will not receive the impression of the seal. Man in affliction will receive the imprint of divine wisdom. It prepares us for glory. The potter beats the clay to make it well-tempered, moulds it on the wheel, and then bakes it in the oven before use. A wooden vessel is turned and cut before it is fit. Gold is heated and pounded before it is complete. So every vessel of mercy must be treated before it is fit for glory. The cross sharpens our faith and sets a sharp edge and luster upon it. The stone is hewed, cut, carved, and polished. So suffering saints are prepared for the highest degrees of glory.

**E. Petitioning God's continuing grace and mercy**

i.e. v.8b “Do not forsake the work of your hands.”

c/w John 17:20-26

**III. RESULTS OF GIVING THANKS**

vv.4-5

“...for they have heard the words of your mouth....”

c/w Psalm 67:1-7

c/w Acts 1:6-8

**Conclusion:**

- J. B. Lightfoot

“Thanksgiving is the end of all human conduct,

whether observed in words or works.”

**Premise:** *A grateful heart is a God-gifted responsibility*