

Be You Thankful

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In one of Richard's last sermons he cited his feeling ill at ease with the world around him ["Passover and Hope"], and in doing so touched a nerve in us all. We, too, feel that we are living in the last days of Rome.

We hear today things that we would have never heard of in years past. For the first time, we begin to wonder if we will have enough oil in the near future, as it is being stated that finding new fields is becoming increasingly difficult. We see some of our Middle East providers threatening to pull back on their supply.

The Palestinians continue to send human bombs into Israel; the same is taking place in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, Pakistan, and other countries. Will all of this someday lead to all-out war?

We have the constant threat of war against this nation by Osama Bin Laden, and there are rumors of bombs planted in this country, along with the terrorists that will do all they can to destroy several major cities. The Patriot Act offers the looming of martial law on the horizon

We see the cost of just about everything going up. We wonder at what our government now allows. Gay rights, and the teaching of homosexual relationships in our schools. We see the authorities in San Francisco allowing gay marriages, even though it was against state law. It makes one wonder, have we gone mad? Has the world gone crazy? The answer is, yes.

We have age issues, health issues, and on top of this we are told that persecution will come upon us because of what we believe.

It is no wonder that we all feel ill at ease in a world that we can see is heading for true chaos and disaster.

I will be the first to admit that it is difficult to retain a positive thankful attitude in the environment we find ourselves in, and yet as Richard brought out we have tremendous hope, and because of that we should be always offering thanksgiving to God.

Thankfulness, appreciation, and gratitude mean a great deal to God the Father and Jesus Christ. We know how we feel when someone has sincerely thanked us for something we have done, or how we feel when one gives us a nice thank you gift, not for any special occasion, but just because they wanted to say thank you and show their appreciation. What are your thoughts every time you see that gift?

Though I have told this story once before, years ago our children, who were not well off by any means, went down and purchased a new gas dryer for us and installed it just because they wanted to give us something. It was not for any special occasion, it was just a gift that said thank you for being mom and dad. Even to this day, even though the gas dryer is not in pristine condition, when I look at it I am reminded of the kindness of our children with a special warmth

Thankfulness is actually giving the gift of appreciation for the other person.

I would like to give you two examples of individuals who gave thanks. This first one has some humor in it:

II Kings 5:1-14 Now Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great and honorable man in the eyes of his master, because by him the LORD had given victory to Syria. He was also a mighty man of valor, but a leper. And the Syrians had gone out on raids, and had brought back captive a young girl from the land of Israel. She waited on Naaman's wife. Then she said to her mistress, "If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! For he would heal him of his leprosy." And Naaman went in and told his master, saying, "Thus and thus said the girl who is from the land of Israel." Then the king of Syria said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So he departed and took with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing. Then he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which said, Now be advised, when this letter comes to you, that I have sent Naaman my servant to you, that you may heal him of his leprosy. And it happened, when the king of Israel read the letter, that he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to kill and make alive, that this man sends a man to me to heal him of his leprosy? Therefore please consider, and see how he seeks a quarrel with me." So it was, when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, "Why have you torn your clothes? Please let him come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." Then Naaman went with his horses and chariot, and he stood at the door of Elisha's house. And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean." But Naaman became furious, and went away and said, "Indeed, I said to myself, 'He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy.' 'Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?' So he turned and went away in a rage. And his servants came near and spoke to him, and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?" So he went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

Can you imagine how he felt, having leprosy and being contagious and all of a sudden this tremendous miracle takes place and he was clean. But, rather than going home, and saying, "Good, I am clean now," and forgetting, he returned to say thank you.

II Kings 5:15-16 And he returned to the man of God, he and all his aides, and came and stood before him; and he said, "Indeed, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel; now therefore, please take a gift from your servant." But he said, "As the LORD lives, before whom I stand, I will receive nothing." And he urged him to take it, but he refused.

Naaman, rather than just taking his healing for granted and returning home, realized that the great gift that had been given to him came from God, and he also realized that all other gods were meaningless. And in deep appreciation and thankfulness he wanted to offer thanks in the form of gifts.

In the New Testament, there is a similar example of this same great gift being given to ten men in great need, and yet of the ten, only one man returned to give thanks, and because of those thanks, something special was given to him.

Luke 17:11-13 Now it happened as He went to Jerusalem that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. And they lifted up their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"

To get to Jerusalem from Galilee, Jesus had to pass through Samaria. Jesus was no doubt traveling through many small villages.

As He entered a certain village He was confronted by ten lepers who were a mixed group of Jews and Samaritans, who stood afar off due to their disease. They were not allowed to enter the village while they were afflicted with the disease. They were unclean, and it was not lawful for them to come near those who were healthy.

As the saying goes, "Birds of a feather flock together", and even though some were Samaritans, these men only had each other. I do not think that we can begin to understand the loneliness these men must have felt.

As Jesus was walking toward the village, they were evidently walking in the opposite direction, and seeing Him, and knowing they were unclean, stood afar off. Then all ten called to Him loudly, and shouted: "Master have mercy on us." They did not even ask to be healed, they just asked for mercy. They must have somehow known who He was, and of His fame. Jesus tells them to go show themselves to the priest.

Luke 17:14 And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed.

This required faith on the part of the men to do what He asked of them, as they knew that before they could be accepted back into society they would have to be seen by a priest.

How far they had to travel to walk to Jerusalem, I do not know. But, as they stepped out in faith they were healed.

Luke 17:15-19 And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. So Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? "Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?" And He said to him, "Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well."

There is more to this story than we just read. Only one out of ten turned, and thanked and glorified God with a loud voice. He shouted at the relief he felt, and at the fact that he could again join society and be with his family. He was truly thankful. He saw more than just being restored, he saw that a wonderful gift had been given to him. He turned and he ran back to Jesus, and fell at His feet and worshipped Him. He was truly grateful for God's goodness and mercy.

Instead of following the letter of what Jesus had told him to do in going to the priest, he immediately returned to first thank Him. And to rub salt into the wounds of the Jews, this one man who came back to offer thanks was a Samaritan.

When we are healed, or forgiven of a sin or error, I think we tend to be like Pharaoh when the pressure is taken off: We relax and we begin to take things granted again. It is a little like a salesperson who works hard for a bonus, and when he makes it, he lets down again and relaxes instead of putting forth the effort to secure the next one.

This is what the nine did. Their problem was taken care of; they were whole again, so, "Let us get on with life" was how they looked at it. But, in taking that attitude, and approach, they missed something wonderful.

They were thankful that they were healed, but not thankful to the One who caused it to happen.

As we see in verse 17, Jesus turned and asked where the missing nine were. This reflects the above attitude. Their attitude was "My problem is solved, so let me get on with life." For all the suffering, all the shame, the pain, the being ostracized from their families, plus all of the other restrictions, and for the constant threat of death hanging over them, they never even considered going back to say, "Thank you for saving us." By their actions they took God for granted.

They were so concerned with their own feelings, that they did not stop to consider that the one that healed them had feelings as well, and truly would have greatly appreciated their taking the time to be grateful and offer thanks.

Again, as we see in verse 18, none returned to give thanks to God except the stranger.

I cannot say how you were affected by your baptism, but I can remember how thankful and relieved I was that I was clean, that all my sins had been removed. But, over the years of being in the church, it is easy to take our calling and the forgiveness God has shown us for granted, and to forget how much has been done for us, and that we owe God more than we can ever repay.

Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong stated that many times he would take his entire prayer time, and just offer up prayers of thanksgiving for all God had done for him.

Verse 19: Jesus said unto him: "*Go your way your faith has made you whole.*"

It is important to note in verse 17 that Jesus states that all ten were cleansed, but this one Samaritan's faith made him whole.

The word for cleansed in *Strong's* is #2511, meaning to be free from dirt, or to be cleansed ceremonially. In other words, legal cleansing from leprosy, so that they can go back into society.

Being made whole is an entirely different story. *Strong's* #4982 means in a broad sense to save, to deliver, make whole, preserve safe from danger. It is used fifty four times in the gospels. Fourteen times it is used for deliverance from disease or demon possession. In twenty instances it is used to imply rescue of physical life from some peril or instant death. The remaining instances refer to spiritual salvation.

I do not know for sure that we can state in certainty that the phrase '*made whole*' pertained to spiritual salvation, but in my thinking it did.

The contrast of all being made ceremonially clean, or cleansed, differs sharply with that of being *made whole*.

The others went their way never knowing Jesus, but this man put his face in the dirt in great thanksgiving and appreciation, and worshipped Him.

The nine received life, but it appears this man received much more because of his thankfulness. He received a close relationship with God.

How important is it to be thankful?

Romans 1:19-21 because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

That is a tremendous price to pay for not being thankful.

Brethren, when we neglect to be thankful we begin to change.

1. The heart becomes hard and selfish, and we take things for granted.
2. People forget those to whom they are not thankful. When we do not appreciate an individual, we neglect to see their worth or value, and it is the same in our relationship with God.
3. And when we are not thankful for what we have been given, we begin to take our blessings for granted, and become ungrateful.
4. And we can learn from this, that an unwillingness to thank God for His great love and mercy will, over time, alienate our affections and harden our heart toward God, causing us to be blinded to all that God is doing in our lives.

When we neglect to give thanks, God knows that we do not appreciate what we have been given. When we do not stop from time to time to consider what we, out of this entire world have received, we cease to give thanks.

We can be working to obey God, we can be blessed by God, and we can approve of God's laws and actions, but if we are not praising and thanking Him, an important aspect of our development in becoming a part of the God family is missing. Gratitude is the glue, in a sense, that cements our relationship with God!

To be able to give thanks, one has to review the many blessings that have been showered upon us.

David and the other psalmists continued to praise and thank God for all the awesome works that He had performed on their behalf that the people might not forget His marvelous deeds and be thankful.

Psalm 136:1-26 Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever. Oh, give thanks to the God of gods! For His mercy endures forever. Oh, give thanks to the Lord of lords! For His mercy endures forever: To Him who alone does great wonders, For His mercy endures forever; To Him who by wisdom made the heavens, For His mercy endures forever; To Him who laid out the earth above the waters, For His mercy endures forever; To Him who made great lights, For His mercy endures forever—The sun to rule by day, For His mercy endures forever; The moon and stars to rule by night, For His mercy endures forever. To Him who struck Egypt in their firstborn, For His mercy endures forever; And brought out Israel from among them, For His mercy endures forever; With a strong hand, and with an outstretched arm, For His mercy endures forever; To Him who divided the Red Sea in two, For His mercy endures forever; And made Israel pass through the midst of it, For His mercy endures forever; But overthrew Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea, For His mercy endures forever; To Him who led His people through the wilderness, For His mercy endures forever; To Him who struck down great kings, For His mercy endures forever; And slew famous kings, For His mercy endures forever—Sihon king of the Amorites, For His mercy endures forever; And Og king of Bashan, For His mercy endures forever— And gave their land as a heritage, For His mercy endures forever; A heritage to Israel His servant, For His mercy endures forever. Who remembered us in our lowly state, For His mercy endures forever; And rescued us from our enemies, For His mercy endures forever; Who gives food to all flesh, For His mercy endures forever. Oh, give thanks to the God of heaven! For His mercy endures forever.

This end time environment can pull us down if we do not take time to consider all of the absolutely awesome things that have been done for us as well.

We have all come through a season that annually reminds us of who we are and the price that in great love has been paid for us, that we might be forgiven and come before the great God of the universe.

We are told in II Corinthians 3 that we are of the very few that has had the veil lifted from our minds that we might understand what this world cannot comprehend.

And what we have been given is considered a treasure placed in human vessels.

How special are we in God's sight?

Ephesians 1:1-14 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He

made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

All of this has been done for us, brethren, and we should be giving great thanks for this.

Ephesians 2:1-8 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,

Here, brethren, we see that there is special treatment given to us. We have so much to be thankful for, and it is sometimes difficult in this society to remember that.

Romans 8:16-18 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

Colossians 2:6-7 As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.

Because we have been given these great gifts we should do all we can to hold on to them, and we should be exceedingly thankful for the truth and the wonderful things that we have been given.

We know, too, that because we possess the truth, this world cannot understand we will receive persecution, but even in this we are to give rejoice and give thanks. I have been watching some of the Seventh Day Adventist films that John was involved with, and you see the martyrs, even ministers, being burned at the stake because they stood up for what was in the bible,

Luke 6:22-23 Blessed are you when men hate you, And when they exclude you, And revile you, and cast out your name as evil, For the Son of Man's sake. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, For in like manner their fathers did to the prophets.

Give great thanks because you are being used to represent God in upholding the truth.

As we see our country flounder in confusion, it can be difficult to offer thanks, and yet the giving of thanks to God is of the utmost importance.

When we are in a thankful relationship with God, our whole attitude changes toward repentance; obedience and overcoming takes on new meaning.

When we truly thank God, we reflect our love toward Him, and we seek to honor Him.

As we appreciate that type of love from our children, and just as we want to do more for our children when they are truly thankful, God, who is capable of far greater feelings, greatly appreciates our thankfulness toward Him, and it results in His wanting to bless us and have a closer relationship with us.

Brethren, we live in a very unthankful world, and we as a nation take all of the wonderful blessings this country possesses for granted, never considering all the sacrifices that have been made to produce them that we might share in them.

Because we live in this society, we must train ourselves to consider our blessings and give thanks.

When we do this it is a win-win situation. We win because we focus on how God is working with us, and God wins because of our response to Him in our giving thanks, drawing us closer to Him.

I Thessalonians 5:16-18 Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.