

## **Thankfulness (1986)**

### **Being Thankful**

**John W. Ritenbaugh (1932-2023)**

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Well, it might be all done with Thanksgiving at the Bulharowski house, but they are not done with it yet at the Ritenbaugh house. We are going to be eating leftovers this evening and maybe for a little bit longer as well. And certainly not done for the purposes of this sermon because I want to give a sermon to you on thankfulness that I hope will help you to bear up under many of the difficulties and hardships that we have to go through in this Christian life.

Thanksgiving has been called the most American of all holidays. But our Thanksgiving is really a parody of the thanksgiving that God so clearly shows that He intends in the Bible. First of all, Thanksgiving is not unique to America. We may consider it the most American of all holidays, but if you have done any kind of reading at all in ancient history, you will be able to see very clearly that thanksgiving celebrations were even held in ancient Egypt; old pagan ancient Egypt was holding Thanksgiving. So were the Greeks and so were the Babylonian people as well. And even our founding fathers, the Puritans, had celebrated one in England before they even moved into Holland preparatory for coming to the United States. And it is said according to their records that they actually picked up the celebration that they used from the Dutch people. So, it is really not American. We have just adapted it to our own uses.

A second thing that I think is wrong in the approach of it, at least our national approach, and that is that it is restricted pretty much to one day. I think almost everybody agrees that Thanksgiving ought to be something that ought to be done a couple of times a day—thanksgiving for the blessings of God in every area of life. But we seem to focus on it at one time of the year, just before Christmas, and that does not seem very appropriate to this minister at all.

Thirdly, maybe this is one of the more important of the things that I think make it a parody, and that is that it really does not change anything. You know, the holy days of God, if the lesson that is behind them is used, it will change a person's life dramatically. It will head them toward the Kingdom of God. But Thanksgiving, as we celebrate it here in the United States, is in many cases done in the midst of a great deal of griping.

I wonder if any of you heard that little blurb that was on Dr. Joyce Brothers program on KNX. It is on there in the morning and most of you would not have the opportunity to hear it. But she was talking about all the griping and grumbling and fighting and everything that goes on at Thanksgiving. In fact, she even quoted a minister (I cannot remember what his name was) but he suggested that maybe the best thing to do in the midst of all this trouble was just forget about celebrating Thanksgiving at all. That is the way it is going to be.

That is one solution. But Thanksgiving really does not interrupt the fighting that goes on in American family life.

Fourthly, though God is occasionally mentioned, what is really focused on is the family activity, and it seems as though Thanksgiving has been promoted by the business interests in order to take advantage of the celebratory aspects of it and make a lot of money. Anybody with any sense would not celebrate Christmas, but it is constantly pounded into us by all of the business interests they are on and they keep the thing going. And that is pretty much the focus of Thanksgiving as well. As a matter of fact, the day after Thanksgiving is the single biggest shopping day in the United States during the year. Makes you wonder about all of the reverence and worship that is associated with Thanksgiving.

Now, here in I Thessalonians 5 beginning in verse 16, a series of succinct commands came to us from God through the apostle Paul.

**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. [or as the Revised Standard Version translates that last verse, "Give thanks in every circumstance for this is God's will."]

Have you reached the place where you can give thanks to God in everything every day, in the midst of all of the difficulties and hardships that are part and parcel of the cross that you bear in the midst of your sickness, in the midst of your financial problems, in the midst of family difficulties, child rearing difficulties? In the midst of all of the trouble that there is on the street, the warfare that you know is going on outside the borders of the United States? The famines that are taking place in Africa? Can you rejoice in everything? Especially, can you rejoice in the things that pertain directly to you?

One might get from this statement that God is some kind of an egotistical monster that kind of feeds off our adoration, but that is not the way God is at all. God is love. That means that He has outgoing concern and if He commands us that we rejoice in every circumstance, then it means that it must be something that is good for us to do. That it is good for us to rejoice when we are in pain. Is it good to rejoice when you are in economic pain? That is sometimes very hard to do, is it not?

But Christianity ought to be an exhilarating experience. And I think whether or not it is depends on our outlook on life. That outlook is going to determine whether or not we are going to be able to rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and be thankful for every circumstance in our life.

Did you notice that those three are equated? Now, we kind of say, well, prayer is really necessary and that is something that I do every single day. But do you rejoice every day? And do you rejoice in every circumstance every day? They seem to be put on a par there, do they not? Well, it can be done. I do not think that God has given us something to do that is impossible to do. I am not saying that it is easy. It may be very difficult for us; and a great deal depends on this outlook that I was talking about. But more about that later.

A little word picture here. If you look at the sun, where is your shadow? You cannot see it because it is behind you. If you turn your back on the sun, where are the shadows? Well, now you are facing the shadow. The sun is the source of light and you know what God uses in the Bible as a symbol for truth? It is light. If we look toward truth, is it possible then that our

problems, the shadows, will be behind us? It is an outlook. It is a way of looking at things. If we turn around and face the shadow, then the sun is behind us. The truth, the revelation of God, the Kingdom of God, the gospel, is to the back of us. And now we are facing the problem. It is an outlook.

But remember, I think it becomes important as we move through the sermon. If we are consciously relating what we are going through—our life's experiences—to God and to His Kingdom, to the purpose that He is working out, and God is love and He is infinitely concerned for us, He is infinitely concerned for the outcome of our life, then I think, brethren, we are going to have the means by which it is possible to look at all of life's circumstances in a thankful way.

That does not mean that we will not be aware of the difficulties, but the outlook changes things. Because I think that if we look at things in this way, we are then going to have a positive, hopeful, and uplifting approach that life is going to consist of challenges rather than problems.

Now, because God is love and because we are His children, and you know what Romans 8:28 says, "All things work together for good." but do you know that that is modified? Did you ever look at the rest of that verse? "All things work together for good to those who are *the* called and who love God." It does not say that everything works for good. It modifies it. It only works for good to those who are *the* called and to those who love God. Now maybe you can understand why some things maybe do not work out so well for some people.

If we have this approach, then it is entirely possible that sickness and health can both be for our good. I am going to show you a verse in the book of Ecclesiastes later that is very interesting in this regard. Both sickness and health can be for our good, that prosperity and financial adversity can both be for our good, that every circumstance in life can be used to our advantage if we have the right outlook. And I think that you see where I am leading with the attitude of thankfulness. The act of thanksgiving has very much to do with whether or not we are going to be able to take right advantage of every circumstance.

Thanksgiving in Hebrew, in Greek, and in English all mean exactly the same thing. It means this: a healthy and cheerful acknowledgment of favors bestowed. The implication is that it is bestowed on us by others. That could be other people or it could be God. It is a hearty and cheerful acknowledgement of favors bestowed on us by others. Those favors could be spiritual. They could be temporal. They could be physical gifts. They could be spiritual gifts. They could be things eternal or they could be things temporal and mortal.

Now, there is an additional part of this definition that is interesting to think about because it also means, to hold responsible. What it means is, that the one you are thanking you are holding responsible for having given you the gifts. And actually your giving of thanks is an acknowledgement that they are responsible for the giving of the gift. So when you thank God, what you are doing is you are holding Him responsible for that. That is not in a bad sense at all. But it is an acknowledgment that He is the one responsible for giving it.

When we look a little bit more deeply into the English word "thanks," it begins to open up something that I think is very interesting. The word "thank" comes from exactly the same root as the English word "think." They come from exactly the same root. Thanking involves thinking. It means, consciously looking for the good. See, you are thinking to enable you to thank. Consciously looking for the good.

Again, this is not always easy because human nature naturally focuses on the negative, on the bad. And it tends to emphasize it. Therefore, thanking also involves the will. It means, consciously forcing oneself to think on the good, consciously willing oneself to give thanks for the favors bestowed, which means that in order to give thanks, one has to consciously direct his mind for the object of the thanksgiving.

Now, this is a process that is very important to conversion. And without it, real conversion cannot take place because God is the giver of every gift. It means that we have to set our wills to consciously think about the gifts and the favors that He has bestowed upon us.

Let us go to I Timothy 3. Thanksgiving is not something that comes by nature. It is not natural for one to give thanks. One has to be trained to give thanks, disciplined into doing it, and that is something that is the responsibility of every parent, to begin teaching their children early in life to consciously think about what has been bestowed upon them by some other person.

**II Timothy 3:1-2** But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy.

The first thing that is listed there, "for men will be lovers of themselves" is the source of all of the other parts of that list that follow. Adam Clarke says in his commentary that he feels that that should have been translated, "men will be studious of their own interests." You see, what he is saying here in effect is that selfishness is the father of being unthankful because that is the spinoff of one being selfish. For men will be lovers of their own selves and then, they love money. They are boasters. All of these are spinoffs of self-centeredness, of selfishness.

They are proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, and unholy. So unthankfulness, then, is a fruit, is the effect of self-centeredness. And love of self, then, is the attitude or the thinking pattern which is the fountain of all sins. The moment that a man makes his own will the center of his life, his relationship with God begins to deteriorate.

A relationship with God is dependent upon obedience to His will. If we begin to feel discontented, resentful with what God has permitted to happen to us in our life, if we are not thankful for what is happening, we are going to sin. It is cause and effect. If we are discontented with our station in life, whether you want to or not, the effect, the spinoff of it is going to be this list of things that is given here in II Timothy 3.

Notice how it concludes: "Having a form of godliness, but denying its power." Being caught right in the middle of that is being unthankful. It is an outward sign of self-centeredness. Maybe that will give you a little bit of motivation to begin to think and to thank God for what you are going

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through. Because if you do not thank God for what you are going through, Paul says here the end result is just to have a *form* of godliness. A form; it is a shadow, it is a vapor, but it is not the real thing.

I am going to add one more factor here. Thankfulness not only requires a conscious directing of the will in examining things, *it also requires faith*. It requires faith in Romans 8:28 that all things do indeed work together for good to those who are *the* called.

Unthankfulness, as we said, has its roots in selfishness and self-centeredness. A little bit more closely related to unthankfulness is pride. Pride will not permit a person to acknowledge indebtedness to someone else for having bestowed a favor, even if that favor happens to be a trial, even if that favor happens to be something that is very difficult and sometimes even painful to go through. But being constantly thankful forces one toward humility. And that may be one of its greatest benefits. It is very difficult to say which came first, humility or thankfulness or thankfulness or humility. It seems as though they go around in the same circle.

But pride and unthankfulness, which is the flip side of the coin, they go together too. This is very important because, as I said to you before, that if a person is not thankful, he must be in a state where he is either drifting or he is against God. And if he is against God, then he is going to sin. If he is drifting because he is not thankful for what he is going through, then the possibility is very great that he is going to sin down the road because he is going to be resentful for what he is going through.

So forcing yourself to be thankful may produce what might be thanksgiving's greatest benefit. And that is, it forces us to humility because it forces us to acknowledge the gifts that have been bestowed on us. Of course, I am thinking mostly of our relationship with God.

Let us go to the book of Luke. There is a very interesting section here in Luke the 17th chapter about the ten lepers that Christ healed. I am going to show you something that maybe you never noticed before in there.

**Luke 17:11-19** Now what 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. They lifted up their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" 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. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and he fell down on his face at His feet, giving thanks. And he was a Samaritan. 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, and go your way. Your faith has made you well." [The King James has the word whole.]

Now all of them were happy and thrilled that this wonderful and dramatic, exhilarating, exciting event have taken place in their life. Maybe it is difficult for you and me to relate to this because none of us are really familiar with leprosy. It is a horribly disfiguring disease that makes people ugly, frightening to look at. Where fingers, noses, ears, parts of the body just fall off, where there is no feeling, no sensation at all in the person's body and they can actually put their leprous hand on a red hot skillet and not even know it, because they cannot feel it. All sensation is gone. So they were consigned to the netherland of the community because of the things that God said in the Bible. They were to be quarantined, they were to be set apart.

But out of the ten, only one acknowledged his indebtedness to Christ. Only one really held Him responsible. Only one took the opportunity to think about his indebtedness and come back and worship the One who had given.

Now, do you see something there? Why I said that if you are unthankful, it is going to lead you to sin? Thanksgiving led the man to worship God! It drew him closer to Him. But if you do not acknowledge the favors that are bestowed upon you, it is going to separate you from God and it is going to lead you into sin.

Jesus makes a very clear distinction here. Ten were healed, but only one came back and expressed his gratitude and Jesus' response was, "Your faith has made you whole." I think that the King James is correct here. He made a distinction between the one who returned and the others who were healed.



What He was implying here is that, because of their lack of gratitude, even though they were healed, He may have concluded that they were worse off than before when they had that horrible disfiguring disease. The ingratitude, brethren, was worse than leprosy.

Think about it. We always tend to equate evil with something that we can see. So, on the one hand, we say, well, an old whore is worse than a white collar worker who steals money from his employer. Christ is making it very plain here that ingratitude ranks very high on His list of terrible sins.

I want you to notice something else. Only the one who came back was made whole, the others were healed. He was made *whole*. What He is saying there is something happened to that man spiritually that set him apart from the other nine. Something good happened to his mind; something happened to his heart. It was not something that was visible on the outside. The others were healed. Something happened to that man's heart that was going to stand him in good with God and the Kingdom of God. It was because he came back and expressed his gratitude. He thought, and his thinking brought him closer to God.

Let us go back to the book of James in chapter 4 and begin to take off on a little bit different tack here. Here, the word being thankful or thankfulness or thanksgiving does not appear, but we are looking on the other side of it, the other side of the coin.

**James 4:1-3** Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not have. You ask and you do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.

Now, why does a person lust? Well, I will tell you why. It is because there is something that he does not have and he wants it. The implication of that is that he is not really thankful, he is not content with what he already has. There is something that he unlawfully desires that he does not have and so all of the conscious effort of his will, of his thinking processes is directed towards what he does not have rather than what he already has.

The catch in all this is what it produces. That if a person is not thankful for what he has, he is then going to expend his energy in desiring things that he does not have. And what is the result? It is war. Or as another translation says, resentment and battle. If you do not want to think of it in terms of war, which might be in your mind restricted to something that happens between nations, resentments and battles brings it down into the family situation. That is something that is a little bit smaller and maybe we can contain that. And maybe this is part of the reason why you may be having so many difficulties within your own marriage; that rather than directing your efforts in thinking about what you do have, all your energy of thinking is being directed towards what you do not have and it cannot help but produce resentments and battles. Is resentment and battles going to stand you in good with God? Is it going to bring you closer to God so that you can worship Him in gratitude. No way!

What we are learning here is that there has to be a radical change in our thinking processes which will drive us away from resentment and bitterness and the desire to have and rather force us toward the thinking of being thankful for what we *do have* rather than unthankful for what we do not have.

I will tell you this kind of thinking leads us into all kinds of family problems. We can get very bitter and resentful about the past, about the way mama and daddy reared us up, or did not rear us up, or what they did not supply to us, what they did not give us in the way of advantages, whether it be gifts, whether it be money or education, whether it be a loving home, a loving relationship with them or whatever. We get so bitter and so resentful thinking about what we did not have, desiring to have something better, but we never give God thanks for what we really do have and build on what we do have. We only have so much energy to expend. We only have so much time to think. We have got to make choices. We have got to choose between what we are going to think about. And one way of thinking is going to drive us away from God and another way of thinking is going to bring us in adoration to Him, to worship Him more closely into a closer relationship.

Let us go to Romans 1. Let us start thinking about things that we *do* have. You could go home today after services are over and you could read the opening chapter in virtually every book that especially the apostle Paul wrote

and every book begins with a listing of what he is thankful for. In Romans 1, here is something that I mentioned it in my last sermon.

**Romans 1:16-17** For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

Now, Paul was not ashamed of the gospel. He did not try to hide it. He was not embarrassed by it. You can tell by what he is writing there that he is grateful that he has it. He is grateful that he knows what the purpose of life is. He is grateful that he knows that someday Jesus Christ is going to return and establish the Kingdom of God on earth. All the pain and horror and suffering that all of mankind has gone through is going to begin to come to an end and there is going to be beauty and peace and harmony and productivity and prosperity and good health.

But over and above that, he knows that he now has it and he has the opportunity to use the time to prepare for the Kingdom of God so that he will be qualified to serve with Christ in bringing these good things.

Is that too abstract for you and me? Is it too big? Is it too shadowy to be really thankful for it, to be thankful that we know why we were born and where we are going? We know that there is a creative process at work of which we are a part and that there is a great and powerful and loving Being who is working in our lives to make something out of us that is just like He is. Maybe this will tell you, if it is too abstract, where you need to direct your study.

Do you consider it a point of thanksgiving that you know what God's child rearing practices are? That you know what God's husband and wife marital relationships are to be? Are you thankful that you are a part of the one true church? That you have God's Holy Spirit? That Jesus Christ and God the Father live in you? Are you thankful that you have this Book that you can read, study into, and get the very best advice that could possibly be given to a human being on what to do with his life?

Let us look down just a little bit further.

**Romans 1:18-21** For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them [or to 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 [look at this next statement], nor were thankful.

All you have got to do is read the rest of that chapter and you will understand why the world is the way it is. Men went into that futile, vain human reason because they were not thankful with what God had given them! Being unthankful produces sins. Being unthankful produces separation from God. Adam and Eve were not satisfied. They were not thankful for what God had given them and they started the course of this world. If they had been pleased with the information, with the knowledge that God gave them, they would have never done what they did.

They were not thankful. They did exactly the same thing that Lucifer did. Lucifer was not thankful with what God had given him. He had *only* put one third of the angels under him. He had *only* given him control and power over the earth and all of its resources. But he was not thankful. That was not enough! He did not think on the good part. He was only resentful and bitter that God had not given him more. After all, look who he was. He deserved better than that.

Is that not the way we think? You bet it is the way we think. If you want to know why the world is in the condition it is, there it is in a nutshell: Mankind has never been thankful for what God has given them and so they turned to their own reasoning.

And what did Lucifer produce? What did he produce with this unthankful thinking? With his lust for greater power? With his lust for a higher position? With his resentful and bitter thinking about the "little" that God had already given him? He produced war and he separated himself from God.

You think giving thanks is not important? I tell you, it is going to set the tone for your relationship with God. It may very well determine how close you are to God because you are forcing yourself to think of all the gifts that He has bestowed. And I will tell you, if you think about them, you cannot help but be appreciative and you cannot help to submit to it—and He gives His Spirit to them that obey Him.

Now, when you find yourself in a not too good a position, what is the reaction? Do you get into a blue funk and all depressed, and begin to throw rocks rather than thank God for the difficulty you are in? See, it is an outlook. How do you look on life's circumstances? Is it all part of a grand design where there was a Master Creator, the greatest Artist that ever lived who is bringing us to perfection into His Kingdom? That He is well aware of what we are going through in our life? He is well aware of the pain, the sickness, the incapacity, the inability, the afflictions, the economic circumstances.

Here is where the faith begins to come back into the picture again. Do we really believe those things enough to know that this circumstance, which God may not have put us in but He has permitted us to be in it, and because He is love, He must therefore consider it good for us to be in pain. Does that make us any different from His Son Jesus Christ, who was perfect, who never committed a sin, and yet He learned by the things which He suffered?

You see, there is satanic that thinking gets in our brains pretty often, because we begin to think that we do not *deserve* to be in this position and that God is being unfair and we become resentful and bitter. We should have more, we should have better. You see, pride is rising. Being thankful sets the tone of our relationship with God.

Let us look at another place in John 8, beginning in verse 1. Something to be thankful for.

**John 8:1-11** Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Now early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when

they had set her in the midst, they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do you say?" This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though he did not hear. So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and he said, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. When Jesus raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

The longer that I am in the church, the more impressive to me is the forgiveness of sins.

Now, what if, in order to have our sins forgiven, that those sins had to rise up before us in a public place like this poor woman taken in the very act of adultery. Which one of us has not done something that is of equal evil, equal iniquity? But what if we had to be accused before the whole village, before the whole city, before the whole town, not just for one sin, but for every sin? And all of the shame, all of the torment, and all of the pain, all the guilt that is associated with the things that we have done secretly, under the cover of darkness, behind the four walls of the house, or where there was no one that we thought could see it. But brethren, what if we had to be accused before the whole town?

But God has been so merciful. And in almost every case, He has allowed us to just secretly come to Him, privately, with nobody else watching, and ask His forgiveness.

I want to draw your attention to something here because He did not leave that woman off the hook. He said, "Go and sin no more." All He did was delay the judgment, and that is where we are. To give us time to change our act. To give us time to build new thinking patterns. To give us time to start a

new way of life. To give us time to be disassociated with the pain of guilt and shame.

Are you really thankful that He has forgiven your sins? Or is it something, because we live in the United States and we see so many representations of this false Christ, that we have taken what He has done and given for granted and we have not really consciously thought, and maybe we really do not believe that death in the Lake of Fire awaits us.

We are accepted in God's presence because we are clean. The only thing that makes that relationship possible and gives us access to the Tree of Life is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Do not ever take it for granted! Every day, not in a trite way, not like so much repetition, go to God and thank Him for Jesus Christ and His sacrifice.

Solomon said a mouthful when he said, "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, the hearts of the son of men are fully set in them to do evil." I will tell you, brethren, if we sinned and lightning bolts came down out of heaven, we would not sin very long. That is not the kind of reaction that God wants because it will not produce the kind of mind, the kind of character that He wants. He does not want obedience out of terror. He wants a submission to His love because we recognize and know, we think upon what He is and we respond.

Let us go to another place in II Corinthians 4. This is a beautiful one.

**II Corinthians 4:1** [Paul opens up this chapter by saying]

Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart.

You know what he lists there in the book of I Corinthians of the difficulties that he went through in carrying out his responsibilities in the work of God. None of us has to this point come anywhere near the things that he went through: being stoned and left for dead, going through shipwreck, being persecuted everywhere, having the daily care of the churches on his shoulders, and on and on. And again, he says,

**II Corinthians 4:2** But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

Paul is beginning to show you a thankfulness that is in him for what he has. And even though he had to go through these very painful situations, he was not going to creep around the bushes, but he was going to manifest as clearly as he possibly could the life of God in himself.

**II Corinthians 4:6** For it is God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

You know what he is referring to there. He is referring to his own conversion, how that he was on the road to Damascus and suddenly a tremendous bolt of light came out and blinded him; that it was that tremendous bolt of light that blinded him that actually opened up his eyes! What he is doing here is recounting how thankful he is that he had to go through that experience. And now he is given insight into the glory of God.

Brethren, this same thing has happened to you. You are being given insight into the glory of God in the face, that means the revelation. Because God is looking at us. He turned His face toward us. He says in verse 7, "we have this treasure," the treasure of the knowledge of God, of the purpose of God, of the forgiveness of sin, of being led through a light, though it contains a whole large group, a series of paradoxes within it. Yet Paul is showing his confidence that it is leading to an end that is so great and glorious that it is almost beyond belief.

"We have this treasure in earthen vessels." Not like the angels. God has given us an insight into Him while we are yet human. Out of the billions and billions of people that have ever lived on the face of the earth, how many of them have ever even come to understand God even as clearly as we do?

Then he begins to tell us why it is this way.



**II Corinthians 4:7-8** . . . that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. [God has to keep us humble. If He does not keep us humble, we do not grow, we do not develop the right kind of character. He says] We are hard-pressed on every side, yet we are not crushed.

Is that the way you look at your problems? You see the faith that is here. But Paul knew that no matter how painful what he was going to go through, that he was always going to come out the other side, that he was going to be better than he was before he went into the pain.

**II Corinthians 4:8-10** We are hard-pressed on every side, but we are not crushed; [and we get] perplexed [if we allow our minds to slip into despair]; [we get] persecuted but [God has not] forsaken [us]; [and we get] struck down, but [we are] not destroyed—[we are] always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body.

Do you understand the import of those words? We have to go through what we go through. That is what he is saying. If we do not go through these difficult times, we are not going to come out the other end looking like Jesus Christ.

Now I said that faith is involved in this. Do you really believe that God is creating in you Himself? And that it is taking these painful episodes to produce what He is? These times of want, these times of deprivation, the times of pain, the times of uncertainty, the times of perplexity, the times of dread, the times of fear, the times that we feel alone, the times that we feel forsaken. I will tell you, if we do see it, we are going to thank God for it. And if we thank God for it, He is going to respond because it is going to draw us closer to Him. It is going to set the tone for our relationship. Because if you do not thank God, the only conclusion that He can come to is that you resent what you are going through.

I will tell you, brethren, what a treasure we have! The pearl of great price has fallen right into our lap and we did not even ask for it—and we grumble.

Let us go to another place, this time in the book of James, the first chapter. Look what he says.

**James 1:2-4** My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

James is looking to the end result of the difficulties that we go through. The only people that can be joyful when they are going through painful difficulties are those who are thankful. Count it all joy. If you truly are thankful for what you are going through, you are going to be joyful.

Now, are your problems oppressing burdens or are they challenging responsibilities? See, it is an outlook. Is it a circumstance that you are going to use to grow? Or is it going to be a circumstance that crushes you? It is all in the outlook.

The thankful person will look upon it as a challenging responsibility, something that he has been given to overcome, a test, a trial. The person who is resentful is going to be crushed by it and he will drift away from God.

Incidentally, this word that is translated "patient" is the Greek word *hupomone*. And the closest English word that we have to it is "steadfastness." That word *hupomone* is not a passive word. It does not mean that we sit there doing nothing. It means that *we bear up under the difficulty while we are overcoming it*. It is the ability to cope. At the base of all this is the outlook. At the base of it, you see, is the way that we look at God. If we are consciously thinking that this that we are going through is part and parcel of the process that is going to produce somebody that is the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ at the other end, then we can have an outlook that is going to make something good out of the difficulty that we are going through.

**Genesis 4:6** So the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry?"

You see, what grew out of his attitude toward God? He was resentful that God had rejected his sacrifice. Now, he should have been thankful that God

rejected it because he was corrected and then the next time he would know the right thing to do. That is the way a thankful person is going to be. It is their outlook on things. Sure, the pain of being rejected is still there. But instead Cain did not think to thank God and his resentment became anger and his anger produced war and his brother ended up dead. Now, look:

**Genesis 4:6-7** So the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you [that is, to attack you, to kill you, to put you down. God is showing sin as though it were an animal.], but you should rule over it."

You see, to thank requires the conscious effort of thinking, of mastering your desire. God has given you a reason now to overcome this. And that reason is the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God gives shape and form to every aspect of life, to all of life's circumstances. And you should understand that everything we do now that nothing is done in vain, that it is useful to a purpose.

Let us go back to the book of Hebrews, the 13th chapter, verse 15. You will find in this scripture, and in many other scriptures besides, that thanksgiving and praise are linked together.

**Hebrews 13:15** Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.

They are so closely linked in the Bible that they appear to be one and the same thing. They are not one and the same thing, but they are very closely related. Praise is an expression of approval, a commendation; giving thanks is an expression of thanks or of gratitude for favors bestowed. But praise is an expression of approval, a commendation, and that especially occurs in the Bible within Psalms.

Now, the reason I believe that they are so frequently related or appear together in the Bible is because praise grows out of thanks. It is when one begins thinking about what to thank God for that one begins to realize, "Hey,

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I shouldn't just thank Him for it. I ought to praise Him for it." That is why all those psalms are there: to extend the giving of thanks over into the giving of praise. Praise extols, it lauds, it applauds, it eulogizes, it acclaims God for His works and all that He has done.

Notice also that Paul very clearly shows that they are a sacrifice, the giving of thanks and the giving of praise are a sacrifice. You are giving time and energy up to something that is toward God, time and energy that you could just as well spend doing something else, like being resentful or being bitter or lusting. There are a lot of things that we could do. So you are giving up something very cherished, that is, time—for God.

Brethren, this is something that we have to grow into. It is not something, like I said, that we are born with and it is something that we should begin teaching our children very early to think about so that they can consciously thank people for what they have given to them. But thinking on the things of God will produce a pattern of thinking that will be grateful, it will be praiseful.

I have a whole series of psalms here that I am not going to read, but they are just a smattering of them to help you to see some of the things that David wrote, and other psalmists wrote thanking God for. The psalms are full of them. Well, they are there to give us an idea about what to think about in relation to God. But I want to go back into the book of Ecclesiastes. I mentioned this verse before.

**Ecclesiastes 7:14** In the day of prosperity be joyful. . .

So when things are going well, it is not wrong to be joyful in that experience, to thank God for it, to thank God for your good health, to thank God for your prosperity, to thank God for the pay raise that you just got, to thank God for a lovely wife and children, and healthy wife and healthy children, and for His calling, and whatever is there in the times of your prosperity, be thankful for it.

**Ecclesiastes 7:14** . . . but in the day of adversity consider.

He is saying this because we are going to go through them. There are going to be days of adversity. There are going to be times when we are not so healthy. There are going to be times when we are not so prosperous and things are not going so well.

Now this word consider means to see, it means to understand.

**Ecclesiastes 7:14** In the day of adversity [understand]: surely God has appointed the one as well as the other.

You understand that God is working out a purpose and that it is part of His purpose that everybody has to go through days of adversity? *Everybody* has to go through times of want, *everybody* has to go through times when things are not going well. Why? I will tell you why: God wants to see the way you are going to react. Understand it, consider it. He is letting you be tested or He put you right into it. He wants to see what kind of stuff you are made out of. Are you going to be somebody that He gives eternal life to and you get into His Kingdom and then you get all resentful when things do not go as well as you think they should? You do not have enough control over your mind to turn the lemons in the lemonade?

**Ecclesiastes 7:14** Surely God has appointed the one as well as the other, so that man can find nothing that will happen after Him.

What he means by that, basically, is that we live through cycles of good and bad, and that these things are going to come and go, and that you just have to bear with them and use it to the very best of your advantage to the Kingdom of God.

Now, there is one thing that thanksgiving produces. Or maybe I ought to put it this way, it is the ultimate reason for being thankful. Maybe that is overstating it a bit, but I will just tell you what it is. (I will give you a couple of scriptures.) It is hope. Do you know that we are saved by hope? A person who is thankful is a hopeful person. A person who is thankful knows that things are going to work out. And there are many, many proverbs on this. Proverbs 14:32, Proverbs 23:18.

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God has promised no trial that will be greater than we can bear will ever come upon us, that God will make a way of escape. Now, if you are thankful for the trial, you can have hope because the one builds on the other.

Let us go to one final scripture in the book of Psalms just to put kind of a cap on things.

**Psalm 103:1-2** Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits.

That is where hopefulness is. That is where thanksgiving is. Directing your will to think on the benefits: the benefits of the trial, the benefits of the adversity, the benefits of the prosperity. There is benefit in each place and God wants us to concentrate on those things.

So, do not forget His benefits and begin to train yourself to look for those benefits and be thankful.