

Message Date: 11-22-20

Message Title: Now More Than Ever: The Importance of Gratitude

- **We're going to start by acknowledging something painfully obvious- something you've been thinking, maybe you've talked about it with others.**
- **Conference call this week... pastor referred to 'these extremely difficult and unprecedented times'**
- **People may debate whether or not these times unprecedented in their difficulty, and historically speaking, they are not. BUT there is no question that they are unprecedented for US.**
- **However LIFE RIGHT NOW is impacting you, there is one reality we all share. We are a people who are experiencing LOSS.**
- **Let's push into that a bit.**
 - **Some, loss of life. Loss of loved ones, covid or otherwise**
 - **Loss of health**
 - **Loss of freedom (may put that at top of list)**
 - **Politics... loss of civility, loss of friends**
 - **Loss of things we have worked for, that are special and important to us. Business. Things we like to do. Things that give us joy**
 - **Loss of security**
 - **Maybe most difficult for many, loss of any sense of CERTAINTY. Loss of CONTROL.**
 - **Because of this, many are experiencing loss of HOPE. Depression, mental illness, suicide**
- **In midst of this all, we are crying out, hungering, for a CURE to our situation... something to give us HOPE.**
 - **Here in Eagle County, lots of people working on issues of mental and emotional health. That is good. That is essential. Many people are looking for ways to bring hope and help to others who most need it... this is also good**
 - **Big news is potential for a vaccine- a medical answer to the pandemic. We want this.. I want this!**
- **But here's the thing. These solutions, to the extent they are, are not guaranteed. They are a source of hope, but they are not a certainty.**
- **HOWEVER... as followers of Christ, we would assert that there IS A CERTAIN SOURCE OF HOPE. That there IS an antidote to the uncertainty, difficulty, and all of this LOSS. AND THIS ANTIDOTE isn't a matter of medicine, it is a matter of FAITH.**
- **Specifically, faith in JESUS, in the good news, the hope, freedom, power of new life in Christ.**
- **AND WE ARE RIGHT to say this! Scripture unapologetically proclaims that the promise of fullness, hope, and freedom is NOT contingent on positive circumstances... sometimes, quite the opposite.**
- **Jesus summed this up in John 16:33 when he said:**

John 16:33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

- **Scripture proclaims that In Christ there is a peace that passes understanding, that will guard our hearts and our minds.... That in the midst of a frail and deteriorating world, we WON'T LOSE HEART when we set our minds on that which is TRUE- TRUE OF GOD, and IN CHRIST, TRUE OF US...**
- **There is a powerful statement in the psalm 118...**

Psalm 118:5-6 (NASB) *From my distress I called upon the LORD; The LORD answered me and put me in an open space. ⁶ The LORD is for me; I will not fear; What can man do to me?*

- **Image- DISTRESS... anguish... reminiscent of valley of the shadow of death (23 Psalm)... IN THAT PACE, God picking us up, and bringing us to a place that is wide, open, no shadows... a place of peace**
- **The ESV translates it this way:**

Psalm 118:5-6 (ESV) *Out of my distress I called on the LORD; the LORD answered me and set me free. ⁶ The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man (this world) do to me?*

- **FRIENDS! POWERFUL truth! But here's the question... WHAT DOES THAT LOOK LIKE? How is this EXPERIENCED, in the nitty gritty, fatiguing, harsh reality of life as it really is?**
- **Scripture gives many answers to that question... LOOK AT JUST ONE.**
- **IN CHRIST, we are renewed day by day, and we are able to live in courage, hope, peace... as we RECEIVE, and put into PRACTICE the great gift of GRATITUDE.**
- **Saw that coming! YES, this Thursday is thanksgiving- although for many, very different.**
- **BUT EVEN if we didn't have a national holiday called thanksgiving, now more than ever, we need to be people of GRATITUDE. This isn't just some spiritual coping mechanism, it is a command of God!**

📖 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 *Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

📖 Philippians 4:4-7 *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

- **WHY is gratitude so important to God? One reason- maybe the biggest reason, is that gratitude TAKES THE FOCUS OFF OURSELVES.**
- **You see, here's the reality. A core characteristic of our FLESH- patterns of our old human nature apart from Christ- is to see things through the lens of SELF. To see life first and foremost by how it is impacting ME.**
 - **My needs. My plans**
 - **My loss. My pain**
 - **My injustice. What's not fair to me.**
 - **My offense. My frustration.**

- **And friends, focusing only on yourself is a quick path to emotional and spiritual paralysis, not to mention relational dysfunction and unhappiness.**
- **BUT... when we choose to see life through the lens of GRATITUDE, it takes our eyes off of SELF so we can begin to see WHAT WE REALLY NEED TO SEE**
 - **Taking our eyes off of self... puts our own situation in PERSPECTIVE. You've heard the comparisons...**
 - **"I hate being stuck in my house!"... homeless person- "you have a house?"**
 - **"Work is so stressful now"... unemployed person- "you have a job?"**
 - **Personal- "I hate wearing a mask at church".... Persecuted believer in one of many countries with no freedom of religion "You get to go to church?"**
 - **Taking our eyes off of self... helps us see the needs of others. Which makes us thankful.**
 - **Taking our eyes off of self... is an antidote to self-pity**
 - **Taking our eyes off of self... opens our eyes to see the goodness of God. It is a source of WORSHIP**
- **NEED TO BE HONEST! There are times when our loss, struggles, pain is so intense that it can drown out and cover up everything else. WHAT ABOUT THEN?**
- **NO EASY ANSWERS THERE. BUT, this is truly where God's gift of gratitude, God himself, invites us to meet him, to cast ourselves upon him.**
- **You see, the miracle we see in Scripture is that IN CHRIST, gratitude is not just our response to positive things... rather, Gratitude is a POSSESSION- it is a gift that cannot be taken from us, because BY FAITH it flows from an unquenchable source- and that source is the absolute truth of WHO GOD IS, and WHAT IS TRUE OF US because of who God is.**
- **I invite you to join me as we look at several passages of scripture that speak to WHAT IS TRUE OF US in Christ, and why this is a source of gratitude, no matter what life may bring.**
- **CHALLENGE. This week, go and read these passages. As you do, ask the Holy Spirit to show you WHAT GOD HAS DONE, what HE has given you, the sources of gratitude that cannot be taken away,**

Colossians 1:3-14 ³ We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴ because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people— ⁵ the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel ⁶ that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace. ⁷ You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, ⁸ and who also told us of your love in the Spirit. ⁹ For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, ¹⁰ so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, ¹¹ being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, ¹² and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. ¹³ For he has rescued us from the dominion of

darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

- **Hope “stored up” of eternity**
- **Message of the Gospel**
- **Understanding of God’s grace**
- **Epaphras- for the people who shared with me, encourage me in my faith**
- **Wisdom and understanding from the Spirit**
- **God desires, intends, to work through me, to bear fruit in my life, look for it**
- **Ability to grow in knowledge/experience of God**
- **God works to strengthen us- we have the power of God in our life**
- **Great endurance and patience**
- **GOD has qualified me (HIS GRACE, by cross) share in his inheritance- be part of his family, I am part of his HOLY PEOPLE... God has set me apart as part of his family, his work**
- **He has rescued me from darkness**
- **Brought me into the kingdom of his son- other scripture- sibling of Christ**
- **I have been redeemed- God has purchased me as his own**
- **In Christ, I am forever forgiven**

- **ALL incredible truths... truths experienced by FAITH. WE CHOOSE to believe these are true, and live as if they are true... live in the GOOD OF WHAT IS TRUE in Christ.**

- **KEY!! It takes NO FAITH to be overwhelmed by our circumstances. It is BY FAITH that God opens our eyes to see the power of his truth IN and BEYOND our circumstances.**

📖 1 Corinthians 15:56-57 *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

📖 Romans 6:17-18 *But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.*

📖 Hebrews 12:28-29 *Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our "God is a consuming fire."*

- **Even though our world is being shaken, our life, our gratitude, is from a source that cannot be shaken. THANKFUL that in Christ my life has a firm foundation.**
- **THIS WEEK, looking honestly around us, may we pray with an open heart for God to open our eyes so that we may see the incredible riches of his presence and the many many reasons we have to be thankful. May we CHOOSE GRATITUDE and ask God to give us the perspective we see in Colossians 3...**

📖 Colossians 3:15-17 *Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*