

## AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

- A. Introduction: We live in a sin damaged world and life is a struggle for all of us. There's no way to avoid trouble in this fallen world. And, there are no easy answers or quick solutions to most of life's problems.
1. But God promises peace of mind to those who keep their attention on Him (Isa 26:3). For several weeks we've been talking about what it means to focus on Jesus (Heb 12:1-2). Let's review some key points.
    - a. The first step to staying focused is realizing that there's more to reality than what you see and feel in the moment. There's an unseen realm or dimension. God, who is invisible, presides over an unseen kingdom of power and provision. This realm can and does affect the material world.
      1. The Bible tells us about these unseen realities. This information changes our perspective (view of reality) which then changes our attitudes and the way we deal with life. II Cor 4:17-18
      2. You become persuaded that God is with you and for you and that nothing can come against you that is bigger than Him. You live with the awareness that everything you see is temporary and subject to change by His power either in this life or the life to come. You're certain that He will get you through until He gets you out. This perspective gives you peace of mind and hope.
    - b. The problem is that when we encounter challenging circumstances, our emotions and thoughts get stimulated, which makes it easy to forget that God is with us and for us. And, what we see and feel in the moment seems much more real than the invisible God and His invisible help.
      1. Therefore, the second step to staying focused is learning to praise God. I'm not talking about a musical or an emotional response. I'm talking about praise in its most basic form—acknowledging God by talking about who He is and what He has done, is doing, and will do.
        - A. When you praise or acknowledge God it puts your attention back on Him and helps calm your emotions and bring peace to your mind.
        - B. Paul the apostle learned to respond to life's hardships with praise by rejoicing (II Cor 6:10).  
To rejoice means to cheer or encourage yourself with the truth about who God is and what He has done, is doing, and will do (Acts 16:16-26; Acts 27:21-25; etc).
      2. Last week we added another important part of this process—remembering God. We looked at David who wrote about remembering and meditating on God and His help in the face of trouble.
        1. Ps 63:5-7—To remember means to bring to mind or think of again (*Webster's Dictionary*). You make an effort to bring something back to your mind. Meditate means to ponder or to murmur. Murmur implies a continuous flow of words or sounds in a low, indistinct voice and can apply to utterances of satisfaction or dissatisfaction (*Webster's Dictionary*).
        2. David made an effort to recall or bring to his mind the fact that God was with him and for him, and then keep his focus there by talking to himself about it—by acknowledging God.
        3. Ps 103:1-2—Praise the Lord, I tell myself; with my whole heart, I will praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, I tell myself, and never forget the good things he does for me (NLT).
  2. This week we're going to add another element to our study—the importance of being thankful. Being thankful to God helps you stay focused on unseen realities and brings hope and peace to your mind.
- B. Paul, in his epistles, wrote much about giving thanks and being thankful. To be thankful means to be grateful, to express gratitude. Part of our duty as Christians is to always be thankful and give thanks.
1. I Thess 5:18—Thank [God] in everything—no matter what the circumstances may be, be thankful and give thanks; for this is the will of God for you [who are] in Christ Jesus (Amp).
    - a. Giving thanks is a volitional action that is an expression of an attitude, a view of reality, or the way you see things. You recognize that in every situation there is always something to be thankful for—the good that God has done, the good that He is doing, and the good that He will do.

- b. We don't thank God because we feel like it or because everything is wonderful in our lives. We thank Him because it is always appropriate to thank Him for who He is and what He does.
2. Remember that Paul's view of reality was shaped by the Old Testament. He would have been familiar with the numerous psalms that open with this statement: Give thanks to the Lord because He is good and His loving kindness lasts forever. Ps 106:1; Ps 107:1; Ps 118:1; Ps 136:1
- a. Ps 100 instructs God's people to enter His presence with praise and thanksgiving: Give thanks as you enter the gates of his temple. Give praise as you enter its courtyards. Give thanks to him and praise his name (NIRV). For the Lord is good. His unfailing love continues forever, and his faithfulness continues to each generation (Ps 100:4-5, NLT).
1. The Temple was the place where Almighty God manifested His presence. God's people are supposed to enter His presence with praise and thanksgiving because He is good, His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures forever. In other words, because it is appropriate.
  2. Thankful and thanksgiving are forms of the same Hebrew word (*yadah*). It essentially means the act of acknowledging what is right about God in praise and thanksgiving. Praise is a form of the word *halal* which denotes genuine appreciation for the character and actions of its object.
- b. As a Jew, Paul grew up under the covenant God made with Israel at Mt. Sinai. At Sinai the Lord gave Moses His Law. This Law provided instructions for various sacrifices and offerings.
1. Lev 7:12-14—One sacrifice was a thank offering or a sacrifice of thanksgiving (*yadah*). This offering was made to God with a public profession of His power, goodness, and mercy.
  2. In good times this sacrifice helped the people remember God's goodness and mercy. In times of trouble it helped them to be conscious of God's nearness and mercy.
  3. Paul wrote to Jewish believers who were experiencing increasing persecution due to their faith in Jesus to look unto Him (Heb 12:1-2) and to offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually.
    - A. Heb 13:15—Through (Jesus) therefore let us constantly and at all times offer up to God a sacrifice of praise, which is the fruit of lips that thankfully acknowledge and confess and glorify His name (Amp).
    - B. The Greek word translated thankfully acknowledge means to say the same thing as or to assent or agree with. In other words, we are to thank God, not based on how we feel or what we see, but based on who He truly is and what He has truly done.
- c. Notice that Paul called this sacrifice of praise the fruit of our lips. The word fruit is used a number of ways in the Bible (literally and figuratively). When used figuratively fruit describes something in or from us that glorifies or honors God. In this case words are described as the fruit of our lips.
1. John 15:8—Jesus said that God is glorified when we bear much fruit. There are many ways we can be fruitful and bring glory to God. But there's one sure way. When you praise and thank God for who He is and what He does it brings honor to Him. Praise glorifies God.
  2. Ps 50:23—Whoso offers praise glorifies me. Praise is the same word used in Lev 7:12-14 to describe an offering or sacrifice of thanksgiving: He who sacrifices thank offerings honors me, and he prepares the way so that I may show him the salvation of God (Ps 50:23, NIV).
3. Col 3:15—Paul also wrote: Always be thankful. To be means to have identity with. In other words, I am thankful as opposed to I feel thankful.
- a. Perhaps you've heard the phrase: Have an attitude of gratitude. Although it is somewhat of a cliché, there's truth to that statement. An attitude of gratitude is a view of reality that affects your response to life. You are a grateful person as opposed to you feel grateful from time to time.
1. Most people would describe themselves as a grateful person. And, most of us are grateful when we get what we want and things are going as we'd like, or turn out as we hoped.
  2. The challenge is remaining grateful (thankful) when we don't get what we want and things don't turn out as we hoped they would.

- b. In an exhortation about living by the power of the Holy Spirit, Paul urged Christians not to get drunk with wine, but let the Spirit of God fill and control them (lessons for another day). In that context Paul talked about giving thanks to God always for all things, in the name of Jesus. Eph 5:20
1. Before we talk more about being thankful for all things we need to briefly talk about where bad things come from. Some Christians say that everything that happens in our lives (good and bad) is from God, either directly or indirectly. Therefore, we should thank Him for it.
  2. But bad things don't come from God. He is good and good means good. (For a full discuss of all the questions raised by that statement read my book *God Is Good And Good Means Good*).
    - A. Jesus shows us what God is like. Jesus said: I only do what I see the Father do. Jesus didn't bring bad into anyone's life, therefore God the Father doesn't do it either. Jesus authorized us to think of God as a Father who is better than the best earthly father. If you wouldn't do it to your child, then God isn't doing it to you. John 5:19; Matt 7:9-11; etc.
    - B. Bad things happen because that's life in a sin cursed, sin damaged world. But God is so big and so powerful that He can use choices and events which He does not orchestrate or approve of and cause them to serve His ultimate purposes.
      1. Rom 8:28—And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them (NLT).
2. Rom 8:29-30—God's purpose for us is that we become His sons and daughters through faith in Christ and become increasingly Christ-like in character and power. c. The point He can be thankful
- for our discussion is that we can thank God for the good that is from Him and for the good He can bring out of things not from Him—life's challenges, hardships, and painful events. We can be thankful before we see results because we know that God is at work and we will one day see.
1. The greatest example is the Cross of Christ. Wicked men, motivated by jealousy and inspired by the devil, incited a mob to turn Jesus over to the Roman government to be crucified. Luke 22:3; Acts 2:23; I Cor 2:7-8
  2. God knew this would happen and saw a way to use it for good. In doing so, and beat the devil at his own game. On the Cross Jesus became sacrifice for the sins of humanity and, through His death, purchased salvation for all who believe on Him as Savior and Lord.
4. Paul wrote Rom 8:28. He would have been familiar with a similar statement made by Joseph, a great-grandson of Abraham. Joseph experienced a spectacular demonstration of Rom 8:28 in his own life.
- a. Joseph's brothers, motivated by jealousy, sold him into slavery. Over a period of thirteen years and a series of challenging circumstances, Joseph eventually ended up as second in command in Egypt (many lessons for another day). Gen 37-50
  - b. During a time of famine in that part of the world, Joseph was reunited with his brothers when they came from Canaan (present day Israel) to Egypt to buy food to survive the famine.
    1. God had given Joseph a plan that provided Egypt with food during the famine. Through this food storage program Joseph's own family (the line through which Jesus came into this world) and thousands of others were saved from starvation.
    2. At the end of it all Joseph was able to say to his brothers: As far as I am concerned, God turned into good what you meant for evil. He brought me to this high position today so I could save the lives of many people (Gen 50:20, NLT).
      - A. God brought tremendous good out of real evil. Not only was the redemptive line saved, multitudes of idol worshippers heard about the One True God, Jehovah, through Joseph and his story. God was with Joseph and got him through the ordeal until He got him out.
- B. (For a more in depth discussion of Joseph's story read my book: *Why Did This Happen? What Is God Doing?*).
1. Joseph's story was written in part to help us learn to look past what we see to reality as

it truly is—God with us and for us, causing everything to serve His purposes as He brings maximum glory to Himself and maximum good to multitudes. Rom 15:4

2. Therefore, we can develop an attitude of gratitude and be thankful all the time in everything, for everything. We can be thankful for the good that God does and for the good that He can bring out of life's hardships.

5. Joseph's story gives us insight into the importance of praising and thanking God in the midst of trouble.
  - a. In the account we're told that that Joseph's brothers didn't recognize him when they came to Egypt for food. But Joseph recognized them and put them through a series of tests to see if their character had changed since they did him such great harm many years earlier.
  - b. Joseph took one brother (Simeon) into custody and sent the rest home with orders to bring Benjamin (a brother still in Canaan) to Egypt if they wished to see Simeon released or get more food.
    1. Gen 42:36—When the brothers returned home and told their father Jacob, his response was, "Everything is against me". Jacob discouraged himself and everyone who heard those words.
    2. What he spoke was not true. Although he couldn't see it yet, everything was going right for him. God was at work, he was about to be reunited with Joseph and wouldn't lose any sons.
  - c. Despite Jacob's reaction God helped him anyway (the redemptive line is stake). But we can learn from his example. In that moment Jacob could have encouraged himself and his sons by recalling God's past help to him and his family, and thanked and praised the Lord for present and future help.
    1. Jacob knew about his grandfather, Abraham, who had repeated interaction with Preincarnate Jesus (Gen 15; Gen 17; Gen 18; Gen 22). Jacob knew that Abraham and Sarah (by God's power) had a child (Jacob's father) when they were too old to have children (Gen 21).
    2. The Lord (Preincarnate Jesus) also appeared to Jacob in a dream and promised never to leave him and to keep (guard, watch over, care for) him (Gen 28:11-17). When Jacob's father-in-law cheated Jacob repeatedly, the Lord intervened and turned it for good (Gen 31:1-13).
  - d. Just like Jacob, our memories fade and we all have a tendency to focus on and talk only about what we see and feel in our circumstances. And what we see and feel in the moment has the stronger influence on us, especially when compared to things we cannot see or feel, like God and His power.
    1. We must put forth effort to bring back to our mind the memory of God's past help and His promise of present help and future provision. Thanksgiving and praise help us get control of the tendency to focus on our circumstances, and look past what we see and feel in the moment.
    2. When you remember (call to memory) God's past help and promise of present help and future provision, and then acknowledge Him through praise and thanksgiving, it brings peace to your mind and makes you hopeful even in the most difficult circumstances.

- C. Conclusion: Most of us have no problem being grateful when things are going well. The issue is when we face challenges (whether it's minor aggravations or major hardships) when we feel like nothing is going right and we have no reason to be thankful for anything. But, there is always something to be thankful for in every situation: the good that God has done, the good that He is doing, and the good that He will do.
  1. When your circumstances are screaming that nothing is right, and your emotions and thoughts are in complete agreement with them, you must choose to call to your memory who God is and what He does.
    - a. Get control of your mind and emotions with your mouth. Begin to praise and thank God for who He is and what He has done, is doing, and will do.
    - b. Thank you Lord for saving me from sin. Thank you for giving me a future and hope, not just in this life, but in the life to come. Thank you Lord that everything I see is temporary and subject to change by your power either in this life or the life to come. Thank you that you are working in my life to bring good out of bad. Thank you that you will get me through until you get me out.
  2. Develop an attitude of gratitude. It not only helps you—it glorifies God! Much more next week!!