

## “THANKSGIVING”

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. (Hebrews 13:15 NKJV)

This is the second in a series of sermons on the component parts of prayer. We began it last Sunday with a sermon on “Praise.”

Ministers talk to old people more than other people do. In almost forty years as a minister I have talked to an awful lot of old people. One thing that I have heard at least a hundred times, “My grandchildren never thank me. I send them birthday presents, Christmas presents. Sometimes, when I visit them or they visit me, I give them some spending money. They never say ‘Thank you.’ I never get a thank you note.” Do you think God notices that there aren’t many people thanking Him anymore? The more He gives us the less we thank Him.

Some of you will go to a restaurant for lunch today. I want you to look around the restaurant and see how many people you see who bow their heads and give thanks for the food before they eat. What about our national Thanksgiving Day? There are very, very few churches that have a service of thanksgiving for Thanksgiving Day. In some communities all the churches come together for a Thanksgiving service the night before Thanksgiving or even the Sunday evening before Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving Day now belongs to parades, football, and the day after Thanksgiving Day sales.

The word “thanksgiving” is a compound of two words. The word “thank” is an old form of the word “think”. Thanksgiving means to think about what you’ve been given (instead of taking it for granted).

1.) giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, (Ephesians 5:20 NKJV)

And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. (Colossians 3:17 NKJV)

We will begin with our daily time of Bible reading and prayer. If you ad lib what you are thankful for, that is better than nothing. If you take a notebook and pen and begin to list the things you are thankful for, you can probably come up with twenty-five or thirty. That is too many for one day, so divide the list among the days of the week. Every day add to that day's list something that is fresh and new.

When you list the things that you are thankful for don't forget those things that pertain to your salvation.

giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. (Colossians 1:12 NKJV)

In the verse I read from Ephesians Paul tells us to give thanks always for all things. We think of those things that are pleasing when we give thanks. It is easier to give thanks for those things that make us happy and fulfilled. It takes a lot of faith and trust to thank God for tribulations, for heartaches, for losses. Our prayers are the sacrifices of our heart and the fruit of our lips upon the altar in heaven. The sweetest sacrifices are prayers of thanksgiving to God in which we thank Him for those things that we cannot see are for our good but which we trust God who said they are for our good:

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28 NKJV)

We aren't being Pollyanna. We believe and thank God for His love.

In New England it used to be the custom at the Thanksgiving Day meal to put out four kernels of corn to remind them of past hardship.

2.) Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, (1 Timothy 2:1 NKJV)

In the back of the bulletin it gives the name of the organist, the pianist, the usher, the liturgist, but after Minister it says "The Congregation." Have you ever thought about what that means? Certainly it means that all the members fulfill the ministry of bringing help and comfort to those who are distressed. Certainly it means that all the members are going everywhere telling the good news. It also means that every believer is a priest who has a vocation to pray.

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; (1 Peter 2:9 NKJV)

What does it mean to be a priest? What is distinctive about the role of a priest? A priest is someone who has access to God. People who want to ask God for forgiveness, or ask God for direction, or ask God for some favor come to the priest. He intercedes to God for them. All Christians have access to God through faith in Jesus Christ. In Romans 5 Paul says "...having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand..." In Ephesians 2 he says "For through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father." The writer of Hebrews encourages us to "come boldly unto the throne of grace." That is a distinctive privilege we have that our unsaved neighbors, family members, friends do not have. Every survey has shown that in every county in the USA at least half of the people are not affiliated with any church.

Who will thank God for blessing, for providing for the needs of half of this town, half of the nation who cannot come to His throne?

3.) Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 NKJV)  
For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:36 NKJV)

In addition to our daily time of personal devotions when we read the Bible and pray, and the time of prayer together with other believers in Church, there is our conversational prayer with God through Christ. When we are born again, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within our hearts. Jesus Christ becomes a friend who walks along with us through the day. God the Father is in our home in heaven eagerly desiring fellowship with us. The more we become aware of their presence alongside us, the more comfortable and normal it is to talk to them. St. Patrick expressed it this way:

“Christ be with me, Christ within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me, Christ beside me, Christ to win me, Christ to comfort and restore me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ in quiet, Christ in danger, Christ in hearts of all that love me, Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.”

*“The Breastplate of Saint Patrick” translated by Mrs. C.F. Alexander*

How does that work out in daily life. You have a close scrape and you thank the Lord for protecting you; you have to run a cranky machine and you thank the Lord when it runs right; you have to go in to see someone who you expect will give you a hard time and it goes smoothly so you thank the Lord for giving that person a favorable view of your request. A mother would thank the Lord when the children are settled and she has a few minutes to herself and some quiet. A lonely old person thanks God for being a companion or for bringing a visitor.

Our prayers of thanksgiving go up to God during our daily time of personal devotions, in corporate worship, and in conversations with God in the midst of our day to day routine.

