

## Thinkful Thankfulness

### Psalm 105

The Baptist prince of preachers Charles Spurgeon was once mugged on the streets of London. Returning home, he told his wife what had happened, and then said, "Well, thank the Lord anyway." His wife responded, "Thank the Lord that someone stole your money?" "No, my dear," said Spurgeon. First, I'm thankful the robber just took my money, not my life. Second, I'm thankful I had left most of my money at home, and he didn't really rob me of much. And third, I'm thankful to God that I was not the robber.

This was the attitude of gratitude exhibited by Charles Spurgeon. In fact, it was Spurgeon's habit, when people asked him how he was, to respond with the words, "Better than I deserve."

It is hard to imagine a church of gratitude in which the seeds of bitterness, murmuring, resentment, malice and general discontent take root. Where gratitude exists, griping does not. Where gratitude exists, pettiness does not. Where gratitude exists, gossip evaporates. Where gratitude exists, conflicts are swiftly resolved. Where gratitude exists, the church keeps the main thing, the main thing.

Gratitude not only chases off several sins, it gives lift to all kinds of Christlike virtues. Gratitude returns sweetness to our prayers and praise. Gratitude returns zeal to our service. Gratitude brings back childlike awe and amazement at all God is doing around us. "When gratitude dies on the altar of a man's heart, that man is well nigh hopeless." -- Bob Jones, Sr.

Gratitude is not an optional extra in the Christian life – like the icing on the cake – nice, but not necessary. Gratitude is not about what mood you are in. As far as the Bible is concerned, gratitude is one of the signs of being born from above, of having met the Saviour, of growing in grace. At least twenty-one times in Scripture we are commanded to be thankful, to give thanks, to offer thanksgiving. In many other places, gratitude and thanksgiving are commended as good and right, and fitting and normal for a believer.

Negatively, in Romans 1:21, one of the indictments against mankind is this: *because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful.*

Unbelief and unthankfulness always travel together. Those who are unthankful are in fact tempting God, as the Israelites did with their unthankfulness.

In other words, gratitude is not so much about how you are feeling about life, it is about what you believe is true about life. Gratitude rises and falls based on two beliefs: what you believe you deserve, and what you believe you have received. An unthankful person believes he deserves much good, and thinks he has received little of it. A thankful man believes he deserves little good, but has received much of it.

So how do we become a people who realise what we deserve, and realise what we have received? The Bible's answer, as seen here in Psalm 105, is to think on what you deserve and what you have received. In fact the word *thankful* derives from the Anglo-Saxon *thinkful*. You have to be thinkful if you're going to be thankful. You have to take time to meditate on what God has done, and what you should have received.

Psalm 105 teaches us how to be grateful. The first five verses tell us what the attitude of gratitude

looks like.

**Psalm 105:1-5** *Oh, give thanks to the LORD! Call upon His name; Make known His deeds among the peoples! <sup>2</sup> Sing to Him, sing psalms to Him; Talk of all His wondrous works! <sup>3</sup> Glory in His holy name; Let the hearts of those rejoice who seek the LORD! <sup>4</sup> Seek the LORD and His strength; Seek His face evermore! <sup>5</sup> Remember His marvelous works which He has done, His wonders, and the judgments of His mouth,*

The rest of the psalm is a model in how to give thanks. Using Israel as its model, we see four ways that God's people are to give thanks. We have to think on these things to be thankful.

## **I. God's Promises**

**Psalm 105:7-11** *<sup>7</sup> He is the LORD our God; His judgments are in all the earth. <sup>8</sup> He remembers His covenant forever, The word which He commanded, for a thousand generations, <sup>9</sup> The covenant which He made with Abraham, And His oath to Isaac, <sup>10</sup> And confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, To Israel as an everlasting covenant, <sup>11</sup> Saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan As the allotment of your inheritance,"*

The psalmist begins by giving thanks to God for being a promise-keeping God. We see this in verses 8-10, with the repeated word *covenant*. What is a covenant? It is an agreement between two parties sealed with an oath. The specific covenant that the psalmist calls to mind here is not the Mosaic Covenant made at Mount Sinai, but the covenant God made with Abraham and His descendants.

From God's side, He promised to give Abraham and his descendants land, seed, and blessing. Even though Israel would turn to other gods, God kept His covenant with Abraham. He kept His promise to put Israel in the land, to restore them to it, and even when exiled from the land, to return them to it. He promised to be their God, and remain faithful to them, even when they were not faithful to Him. As Israel reflected back, they were to give thanks, sing to God, sing psalms to Him, make known His deeds. This was a joyous thing!

Why? In a world filled with truce-breakers, oath-breakers, liars, perjurers, how glad we should be to come across someone who will keep His promises. To know that God is willing to make promises to people, and to know that He cannot lie, and cannot fail to keep what He commits Himself to, is a deep and profound joy. In a world where it seems that anything can change at anytime – here is a firm foundation: God makes promises and keeps them.

What promises has God made New Testament believers? Do you realise that your whole faith depends on promises? If you have trusted Christ, the whole thing is dependent on promises. God promises that those who turn from sin and self, and receive Jesus Christ's atonement, as their new life, as their Lord, will be saved from sin's penalty, and power. He promises to give you a new nature, eternal life, and a future inheritance. But all that depends on God's keeping His Word. If He didn't, if He doesn't, what would happen?

Outside of Jesus Christ, God has no pleasant promises for you. Ephesians 2 tells us that *at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. (Eph. 2:12)*

But once in Christ, a wealth of promises opens up.

<sup>20</sup> *For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us. (2 Cor. 1:20)*

There are approximately 8,810 promises in the entire Bible. In the Old Testament there are 7,706 and in the New Testament there are 1,104 wonderful promises. Now not every one of them is directed to you as a New Testament believer, but a huge proportion of them are. Far more than you need to be content, grateful.

It is remembrance of the promises that brings gratitude. Remember when Pilgrim leaves the Main Highway and follow another Path which seemed easier. But this Path leads him into the territory of Giant Despair who owns Doubting Castle. Eventually he is captured by Giant Despair and kept in a dungeon. He is advised to kill himself. The Giant said there was no use trying to keep on with his journey. For the time, it seemed as if Despair had really conquered Christian.

Now a little before it was day, good Christian, as one half- amazed, broke out in passionate speech, "What a fool am I thus to lie in a stinking Dungeon, when I may as well be at liberty. I have a Key in my bosom called Promise that will, I am persuaded, open any lock in Doubting Castle." Then said Hopeful, "That's good news. Good Brother, pluck it out of thy bosom and try." And the prison gates flew open.

If you want to be thankful enough to be thankful, you have to be in the Word until the Word is in you. You have to look at life through the lens of promises. You have to see the present through the filter of the future.

But Israel was encouraged to think not only on God's promises to them, but also a second work of God.

## II. God's Protection

**Psalm 105:12-15** <sup>12</sup> When they were few in number, Indeed very few, and strangers in it. <sup>13</sup> When they went from one nation to another, From one kingdom to another people, <sup>14</sup> He permitted no one to do them wrong; Yes, He rebuked kings for their sakes, <sup>15</sup> Saying, "Do not touch My anointed ones, And do My prophets no harm."

The psalmist praises God that God protected Israel. Even when they were just a few – just Abraham and his family, or Isaac and His, or Jacob and his sons, they were no match for the hostile kingdoms around them. They could easily have been absorbed, scattered, or killed by a vindictive king at any time. Sometimes, they even needed protection from themselves, as when Abraham and Isaac nearly gave their wives to pagan kings.

But through this all, God protected His people physically, and protected them from being mixed with other peoples. He protected His own promises, and protected His people physically, and spiritually. Israel had survived and could thank God for protection.

You often don't realise how much you have been protected until you have a close shave, or a brush with danger. When you dwell securely, you begin to take protection for granted. But after you do, you come to realise how many ways you could be harmed. You understand how many threats there are, and how God has truly fenced you about and watched over you.

One of the American Indian tribes had an interesting way of training young braves. On the night of a boy's thirteenth birthday, after learning hunting, scouting, and fishing skills, he was put to one final test. He was placed in a dense forest to spend the entire night alone. He had up to that point lived under the blanket of his family's security, but now he spent a terrifying night in the forest, with wild animals. Only in the morning, when dawn broke, and the light came in, did the boy begin to recognise flowers, trees, and the path. But then, most amazingly, the boy would look over and see

the figure of a man standing not far from him, armed with a bow and arrow. It was the boy's father, who had been there all night long.

He protects us from the many possible physical threats: attacks from criminals, car accidents, accidents at home or at work.

More than that, God provides spiritual protection. There are so many threats to our faith. Satan seeks to destroy us. He sends false teachers along to divert us, confuse us, and pervert the sound teaching of the Word of God. He sends apostates from within the church to draw others away. He raises up wolves, who infiltrate the church, posing as sheep, but seek to turn others against the under-shepherds, and draw people away after themselves.

God protects you from your own faith failing, from falling into utter despair and unbelief.

And can I tell you the greatest protection God affords you? In Christ, God protects you from God. The word propitiation in Scripture means the quenching of God's anger. On the Cross, God the Son satisfied the holy and just anger of God on behalf of those who trust in Him. If you are not in Christ, then where does God's holy anger fall? It falls on you. And there is no enemy as fearful as God, no threat in all the world who you should fear more than God, no calamity as terrible as being the target for God's holy anger. In Christ, you are protected. Those glorious closing words of Romans 8 are words of protection.

*<sup>38</sup> For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, <sup>39</sup> nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:38-39)*

Why should we not all have fallen to unbelief and apostasy? Why should we not all have fallen into temptations that would have disqualified us from ministry or destroyed our lives? Why should we not have been taken by too severe for us? He has protected you from false teaching too crafty and and too subtle for you to detect and discern. Most of all, He has protected you from Himself. This all comes from the good hand of our protecting God. Our shield, our high tower, our defender, our Shepherd with His rod and staff.

Israel was to reflect on God's promises, on God's protection, and then thirdly,

### III. God's Providences

**Psalm 105:16-38** <sup>16</sup> Moreover He called for a famine in the land; He destroyed all the provision of bread. <sup>17</sup> He sent a man before them -- Joseph -- who was sold as a slave. <sup>18</sup> They hurt his feet with fetters, He was laid in irons. <sup>19</sup> Until the time that his word came to pass, The word of the LORD tested him. <sup>20</sup> The king sent and released him, The ruler of the people let him go free. <sup>21</sup> He made him lord of his house, And ruler of all his possessions, <sup>22</sup> To bind his princes at his pleasure, And teach his elders wisdom. <sup>23</sup> Israel also came into Egypt, And Jacob dwelt in the land of Ham. <sup>24</sup> He increased His people greatly, And made them stronger than their enemies. <sup>25</sup> He turned their heart to hate His people, To deal craftily with His servants. <sup>26</sup> He sent Moses His servant, And Aaron whom He had chosen. <sup>27</sup> They performed His signs among them, And wonders in the land of Ham. <sup>28</sup> He sent darkness, and made it dark; And they did not rebel against His word. <sup>29</sup> He turned their waters into blood, And killed their fish. <sup>30</sup> Their land abounded with frogs, Even in the chambers of their kings. <sup>31</sup> He spoke, and there came swarms of flies, And lice in all their territory. <sup>32</sup> He gave them hail for rain, And flaming fire in their land. <sup>33</sup> He struck their vines also, and their fig trees, And splintered the trees of their territory. <sup>34</sup> He spoke, and locusts came, Young locusts without number, <sup>35</sup> And ate up all the vegetation in their land, And devoured the fruit of their ground. <sup>36</sup> He also destroyed all the firstborn in their land, The first of all their strength. <sup>37</sup> He also brought them out with silver and gold, And there was none feeble among His tribes. <sup>38</sup> Egypt was glad when they departed, For the fear of them had fallen upon them.

The psalmist here thanks God for His wonderful acts which included such strange things as a

famine, the unfair imprisonment of a just man – Joseph, the exaltation of Joseph, the prosperity of Israel in the land of Egypt, followed by the ascendancy to the throne of an evil Pharaoh who put them in bondage, followed by the ten plagues on Egypt, until Israel were voluntarily released, and loaded with gold and silver.

What do we call all this? Providence. Providence is God's gracious guidance and governance of all events, including the free acts of men and their external circumstances, and directs all things to their appointed ends for His glory.

God was in control of the evil that happened to Joseph, and the good. He was in control of the Pharaoh that loved Joseph, and in control of the Pharaoh that hated Moses. He was in control of when there were years of plenty, and when there were years of famine. He got Israel into Canaan, and then down into Egypt as a group of 120, and then multiplied them in Egypt into a group of two million, and then led them all out with a mighty hand. God was in control of light and dark, the rivers, frogs, lice, flies, locusts, hail, down to the lives of the firstborn. Joseph understood providence when speaking to his brothers.

**Genesis 50:20** <sup>20</sup> *"But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.*

Now one of the most exciting things about being a Christian is being able to see God at work. Outside of Christ, life seems random, chaotic, disorderly. But in Christ, we realise it is a story, beautifully written by a master Author. When we look at circumstances through the eyes of faith, we can have a grateful attitude for providence. God rules over all, and He rules for His glory, and for our good.

Providence in Christ. **Romans 8:28** *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*

**James 1:2-4** <sup>2</sup> *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,* <sup>3</sup> *knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.* <sup>4</sup> *But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.*

This is why at the heart of gratitude is a heart of believing submission. The Christian thinking like this understands that his life has been ordered by God. He submits to God's wise choices for his life, and is grateful for them. He is grateful if not for the actual circumstances, then for the fact that God is in control of them. He submits to God – bows the knee and accepts all of life as part of the providential and wise hand of God.

Remember Paul and Silas? After having been beaten and placed in stocks in Philippi – they began to sing praises to God. Were they reacting to their circumstances – or acting upon their relationship to God? They were acting – choosing, deciding to submit to God. They chose to rejoice in the God of their circumstances. As they did that, no doubt a real and genuine joy sprung up.

Have you reflected on God's providences in your life? Have you thanked him for how He has shaped you, where He took you, the people He used in your life, the painful trials and problems He used, the chance meetings, the exposure to the Gospel, the financial and physical circumstances He put you in? Can you see it is ordered from a hand that loves you, and knows what you need at this time in your life? When you think of your history, do you think of it as His -story?

Now look at the fourth reason for Israel's thanksgiving.

## IV. God's Provision

**Psalm 105:39-44** <sup>39</sup> He spread a cloud for a covering, And fire to give light in the night. <sup>40</sup> The people asked, and He brought quail, And satisfied them with the bread of heaven. <sup>41</sup> He opened the rock, and water gushed out; It ran in the dry places like a river. <sup>42</sup> For He remembered His holy promise, And Abraham His servant. <sup>43</sup> He brought out His people with joy, His chosen ones with gladness. <sup>44</sup> He gave them the lands of the Gentiles, And they inherited the labor of the nations, <sup>45</sup> That they might observe His statutes And keep His laws. Praise the LORD!

The psalmist thanks God because God provided. How did He provide? He provided guidance and direction through the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire. In the desert, where there is almost no food at all. He provided water in a desert. He provided them with both bread and meat. He provided water for them. He brought them into the land He had promised, where God provided them with houses they had not built, farms, field and vines they had not planted or cultivated. He richly provided for them.

One of the things we drill into our children is gratitude. Why? Because the human drifts to taking things for granted. It loses wonder and amazement if left to itself. Soon you have more and more, but your heart has less and less amazement. *Your gratitude is proportional to what you think you deserve.* The unthankful are simply proud people exalted in their own eyes. Unthankfulness in my heart is when I am so great in my own eyes that I expect the world to lay its presents at the feet of King Self, and arrogantly spurn the gifts that do not meet my expectations. When people or circumstances fail to meet my proud expectations of what I deserve – I become unhappy and unthankful. I grumble and murmur – because I feel I am being mistreated.

You say, 'If I had a little more, I should be very satisfied.' You make a mistake. If you are not content with what you have, you would not be satisfied if it were doubled. - Spurgeon

Interestingly, before Jesus cleansed 10 lepers of whom only one was thankful, he gave a parable on servanthood. He said that a slave does not get thanked for the things he does, nor does a master reward the slave for the things he is expected to do. In the same way, Jesus said we as Christians should not walk around with the haughty expectation that God must give us a pat on the back and gift us with all things. Rather, we should regard ourselves as unprofitable servants, who are simply doing our duty. Because from there, we will be so surprised and amazed at the generosity and kindness of our good Master.

In Christ, we are fully provided for, <sup>8</sup> And God *is* able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all *things*, may have an abundance for every good work. (2 Cor. 9:8)

<sup>19</sup> And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:19)

Have you spent time thinking of all God has provided you with? We are supposed to be content with food and clothing, but has God given you more than that? Think of all the advantages He has given you. Think of your goods, and your income more than what you need for food and clothing. Think of how many luxuries and kindnesses fill your days. Think of how many helpers, teachers, advisors, counsellors, examples, encouragers he has sent you. Think of how many opportunities he has given you, more time to know and love Him. Think of how He has given you all things necessary for life and godliness. Have you ever lacked what you needed to be godly? Have you ever lacked what you needed to be content? Remember contentment is learned and obeyed.

What is cause for gratitude? God's promises, protection, providences and provision.

When all thy mercies, O my God,  
My rising soul surveys,  
Transported with the view, I'm lost  
In wonder, love, and praise.

Ten thousand thousand precious gifts  
My daily thanks employ;  
Nor is the least a cheerful heart  
That tastes those gifts with joy.

**Psalm 105:1-4** Oh, give thanks to the LORD! Call upon His name; Make known His deeds among the peoples! <sup>2</sup> Sing to Him, sing psalms to Him; Talk of all His wondrous works! <sup>3</sup> Glory in His holy name; Let the hearts of those rejoice who seek the LORD! <sup>4</sup> Seek the LORD and His strength; Seek His face evermore!