

Thanks for Nothing

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Let's open our Thanksgiving week broadcast as the Ridgecrest United Methodist Church Choir sings, "I Will Give Thanks to the Lord."

[music – "I Will Give Thanks to the Lord"]

Part 1

Traditionally, on Thanksgiving, we give thanks for all the blessings we have; but that's really only half of the story. We should also give thanks for the things we don't have. The Gospels tell us of several instances in which people were extremely grateful for no longer having something they previously had. They were glad not to have it any more. Two of these stories are retold in greater detail in chapter 36 of *The Desire of Ages*.

[F]or twelve years [a poor woman] had suffered from a disease that made her life a burden. She had spent all her means upon physicians and remedies, only to be pronounced incurable. But her hopes revived when she heard of the cures that Christ performed. She felt assured that if she could only go to Him she would be healed. In weakness and suffering she came to the seaside where He was teaching, and tried to press through the crowd, but in vain. Again she followed Him from the house of Levi-Matthew, but was still unable to reach Him. She had begun to despair, when, in making His way through the multitude, He came near where she was.

The golden opportunity had come. She was in the presence of the Great Physician! But amid the confusion she could not speak to Him, nor catch more than a passing glimpse of His figure. Fearful of losing her one chance of relief, she pressed forward, saying to herself, "If I may but touch His garment, I shall be whole." As He was passing, she reached forward, and succeeded in barely touching the border of His garment. But in that moment she knew that she was healed. In that one touch she concentrated the faith of her life, and instantly her pain and feebleness gave place to the vigor of perfect health.

With a grateful heart she then tried to withdraw from the crowd; but suddenly Jesus stopped, and the people halted with Him. He turned, and looking about asked in a voice distinctly heard above the confusion of the multitude, "Who touched Me?" The people answered this query with a look of amazement. Jostled upon all sides, and rudely pressed hither and thither, as He was, it seemed a strange inquiry.

Peter, ever ready to speak, said, "Master, the multitude throng Thee and press Thee, and sayest Thou, Who touched Me?" Jesus answered, "Somebody hath touched Me: for I perceive that virtue is gone out of Me." The Saviour could distinguish the touch of faith from the casual contact of the careless throng. Such trust should not be passed without comment. He would speak to the humble woman words of comfort that would be to her a wellspring of joy,--words that would be a blessing to His followers to the close of time.

Looking toward the woman, Jesus insisted on knowing who had touched Him. Finding concealment vain, she came forward tremblingly, and cast herself at His feet. With grateful tears she told the story of her suffering, and how she had found relief. Jesus gently said, "Daughter,

be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace." He gave no opportunity for superstition to claim healing virtue for the mere act of touching His garments. It was not through the outward contact with Him, but through the faith which took hold on His divine power, that the cure was wrought. ...

After healing the woman, Jesus desired her to acknowledge the blessing she had received. The gifts which the gospel offers are not to be secured by stealth or enjoyed in secret. So the Lord calls upon us for confession of His goodness. ...

Our confession of His faithfulness is Heaven's chosen agency for revealing Christ to the world. We are to acknowledge His grace as made known through the holy men of old; but that which will be most effectual is the testimony of our own experience. We are witnesses for God as we reveal in ourselves the working of a power that is divine. Every individual has a life distinct from all others, and an experience differing essentially from theirs. God desires that our praise shall ascend to Him, marked by our own individuality. These precious acknowledgments to the praise of the glory of His grace, when supported by a Christ-like life, have an irresistible power that works for the salvation of souls.

When the ten lepers came to Jesus for healing, He bade them go and show themselves to the priest. On the way they were cleansed, but only one of them returned to give Him glory. The others went their way, forgetting Him who had made them whole. How many are still doing the same thing! The Lord works continually to benefit mankind. He is ever imparting His bounties. He raises up the sick from beds of languishing, He delivers men from peril which they do not see, He commissions heavenly angels to save them from calamity, to guard them from "the pestilence that walketh in darkness" and "the destruction that wasteth at noonday" (Ps. 91:6); but their hearts are unimpressed. He has given all the riches of heaven to redeem them, and yet they are unmindful of His great love. By their ingratitude they close their hearts against the grace of God. Like the heath in the desert they know not when good cometh, and their souls inhabit the parched places of the wilderness.

It is for our own benefit to keep every gift of God fresh in our memory. Thus faith is strengthened to claim and to receive more and more. There is greater encouragement for us in the least blessing we ourselves receive from God than in all the accounts we can read of the faith and experience of others. The soul that responds to the grace of God shall be like a watered garden. His health shall spring forth speedily; his light shall rise in obscurity, and the glory of the Lord shall be seen upon him. Let us then remember the loving-kindness of the Lord, and the multitude of His tender mercies. Like the people of Israel, let us set up our stones of witness, and inscribe upon them the precious story of what God has wrought for us. And as we review His dealings with us in our pilgrimage, let us, out of hearts melted with gratitude, declare, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all His people." Ps. 116:12-14. ¹

Let's keep every gift of God fresh in our memories as Susan Pogge and JoAn Witzel play, "Ode to Thanksgiving."

[music – "Ode to Thanksgiving"]

¹ Ellen G. White, Desire of Ages, Chapter 36, "The Touch of Faith", <http://www.whiteestate.org/books/da/da36.html>

Part 2

The story of the ten lepers was mentioned briefly in our first segment. For those of you who haven't heard the story, it is found in Luke, chapter 17, verses 11 through 19.

Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed.

One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

The one leper who returned said to Jesus, "Thanks for nothing!", but in the nicest possible way. He wasn't thanking Jesus for what he had—he was thanking Jesus for what he no longer had. He didn't have leprosy any more—he had no disease at all. He had nothing, and he was thankful for it.

I own a tattered old book titled, Complete Guide to Symptoms, Illness, and Surgery. It lists 520 illnesses and disorders. I don't have a single one of them. Right there, that's 520 things I can be thankful for not having.

We often give thanks for what we have, and we certainly should do that; but let's not forget to give thanks for everything we don't have.

We can be thankful that there aren't a bunch of Occupy Ridgecrest protestors vandalizing and looting our stores. We can be thankful we aren't homeless and hungry. There are so many horrible things that could have happened to us, but haven't.

Many people are worse off than you are. I'm not suggesting that you revel in the misery of the people surrounding you; but you certainly can be thankful not to be in their position.

John Bradford was an English Reformer imprisoned in the Tower of London for his Protestant faith. Looking out from his cell, seeing a criminal on his way to execution, he was rumored to have said, "There, but for the grace of God, goes John Bradford". Whether he actually said that or not, there is truth in the statement. No matter how bad off we are, it could always be worse.

So, if you think you don't have anything to be thankful for, you can still be thankful for all the misery you don't have. And if you think you don't have anything to be thankful for, you probably aren't thinking hard enough. You are more richly blessed than you might imagine.

God really wants to bless you, and He will do so at every opportunity. God didn't have to make raspberries. We could live on a much more restricted diet that doesn't include many of the wholesome,

good tasting natural foods we enjoy. But God gave us a variety of good things to eat out of the goodness of his heart. Let's not take all the good things He has given us for granted.

Many of the Psalms remind us of how much God loves us and blesses us. The first one that comes to mind is Psalm 23.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

That isn't the only psalm of thanksgiving. There are lots more, including Psalm 100.

**Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.
Worship the LORD with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs.**

**Know that the LORD is God.
It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.**

**Enter his gates with thanksgiving
and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and praise his name.**

**For the LORD is good and his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues through all generations.**

These two short psalms acknowledge our blessings in general terms. Some of the longer psalms give specific lists of all the good things God does for us. Let's listen to Psalm 147, and pay special attention to all the specific reasons why we should be thankful to God.

Praise the LORD.

**How good it is to sing praises to our God,
how pleasant and fitting to praise him!**

**The LORD builds up Jerusalem;
he gathers the exiles of Israel.**

**He heals the brokenhearted
and binds up their wounds.**

**He determines the number of the stars
and calls them each by name.
Great is our Lord and mighty in power;
his understanding has no limit.
The LORD sustains the humble
but casts the wicked to the ground.**

**Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving;
make music to our God on the harp.
He covers the sky with clouds;
he supplies the earth with rain
and makes grass grow on the hills.
He provides food for the cattle
and for the young ravens when they call.**

**His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse,
nor his delight in the legs of a man;
the LORD delights in those who fear him,
who put their hope in his unfailing love.**

**Extol the LORD, O Jerusalem;
praise your God, O Zion,
for he strengthens the bars of your gates
and blesses your people within you.
He grants peace to your borders
and satisfies you with the finest of wheat.**

**He sends his command to the earth;
his word runs swiftly.
He spreads the snow like wool
and scatters the frost like ashes.
He hurls down his hail like pebbles.
Who can withstand his icy blast?
He sends his word and melts them;
he stirs up his breezes, and the waters flow.**

**He has revealed his word to Jacob,
his laws and decrees to Israel.
He has done this for no other nation;
they do not know his laws.**

Praise the LORD.

This psalm began by thanking God for national protection. Of course, the psalm is referring specifically to Israel, but hasn't God also blessed the United States? When you consider how quickly the United States grew from thirteen struggling colonies to a world superpower, it is hard to argue that God hasn't blessed the United States.

Verse 3 reminds us of God's comfort and healing. Then verse 4 begins a long section dealing with God's creative power and His continuing power over nature, including His continual care and feeding of all of His creatures.

It ends by thanking God for the special blessing of His laws. Imagine what life would be like if nobody obeyed God's laws. Our happiness and prosperity depend, to a large extent, on keeping God's laws.

Moses told all the people, including us, how to be blessed in Deuteronomy 28, verses 1 through 14.

If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God:

You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country.

The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock—the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks.

Your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed.

You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out.

The LORD will grant that the enemies who rise up against you will be defeated before you. They will come at you from one direction but flee from you in seven.

The LORD will send a blessing on your barns and on everything you put your hand to. The LORD your God will bless you in the land he is giving you.

The LORD will establish you as his holy people, as he promised you on oath, if you keep the commands of the LORD your God and walk in his ways. Then all the peoples on earth will see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they will fear you. The LORD will grant you abundant prosperity—in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your ground—in the land he swore to your forefathers to give you.

The LORD will open the heavens, the storehouse of his bounty, to send rain on your land in season and to bless all the work of your hands. You will lend to many nations but will borrow from none. The LORD will make you the head, not the tail. If you pay attention to the commands of the LORD your God that I give you this day and carefully follow them, you will always be at the top, never at the bottom. Do not turn aside from any of the commands I give you today, to the right or to the left, following other gods and serving them.

In Matthew 5:45, Jesus tells us,

... your Father in heaven ... causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

Yes, God blesses everyone; but He blesses those who obey Him even more abundantly. If you feel short-changed in the blessing department, what is the reason for it? Is it because you have come to take God's blessing for granted and therefore don't recognize all the wonderful things God has done for you? Or is it

because you have let your obedience lapse and are receiving only the blessings that are common to man, and are missing out on the extra blessings God gives to his faithful children?

We began this segment with a story about ten lepers. Let's end it with a story about one, found in Matthew 8, verses 1 through 3.

When he came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."

Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cured of his leprosy.

Jesus is not just willing, He is eager, to bless you by giving you good things, and by taking away bad things. But He didn't take the leprosy away from these 11 lepers until they asked.

No matter what your situation is today, you can be thankful for the good things you have, and the bad things you don't have. And, if you want to be more thankful next year, then ask God to take away the sinful things in your life, and live in harmony with Him so that he can bless you all the more.

[music – "The Blessings" by Alabama]