

Don't Overlook Thanksgiving

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[0 : 00] right now because people are already getting into the Christmas mood and it's still 28 days away. How many of you put up a Christmas tree or some decorations this weekend already? Raise your hand.

A lot of people. I've been married for 38 years now and just as sure as Thursday is Thanksgiving Day, Saturday after Thanksgiving is when we put up our tree. I don't have a choice. That's what Elisa wants to do and that's what we do. We put up that tree Saturday after Thanksgiving always. If holidays were people, Christmas would just be smiling. But if holidays were people, Thanksgiving would be hurt, even depressed right now. That's because most people it seems only to give passing notice to Thanksgiving. A lot of people this past Thursday didn't really think a whole lot about Thanksgiving. They ate their turkey and dressing and planned their Black Friday shopping or their football watching schedule for this weekend. Thanksgiving would also be angry because more and more people have elevated Halloween to holiday status and put less emphasis on Thanksgiving. But think about that. Halloween is basically a pagan notion.

But Thanksgiving is the national holiday created to express heartfelt gratitude to God for the way he has blessed us in this country. Even though we are three days removed from Thanksgiving Day, I want us to give our attention to this forgotten holiday this morning, Thanksgiving. But more importantly, I want us to see how giving thanks to God is found throughout the Bible as an ever-present attitude among God's people. What I want us to do is answer four questions this morning related to thanks, thanksgiving. First, are you a thankful person? Are you a thankful person? Some people really are not.

In fact, there's a lot of people, they think more along the lines of being entitled. A lot of people. I want you to check yourself. Do you believe that you deserve special treatment? At least from certain people in your life. Do you think that I'm entitled to this or that from my parents or from my teachers or from my employer? Do you even really expect to be blessed by God?

A lot of people have this entitlement mentality today. But that is contrary to what the Bible teaches about us, about who we are and really what we should suspect. The Bible is very clear and we've talked about it a lot over the years and we will always talk about it. The Bible talks about us being sinners by nature and by choice. And the only thing that we really and truly deserve is death and hell.

[3 : 42] The Bible says it like this in Romans chapter 3, None is righteous. None is righteous. No, not one. No one understands. No one seeks for God. All have turned aside.

Together they have become worthless. No one does good, not even one. Now as Paul is quoting from the Old Testament, he is not saying that every person is as bad as they can possibly be. But he is saying that before God, we are rebels. We are lawbreakers. We are not in any way as we stand before God, right with Him. We're self-centered people, not God-centered as we should be if He is our Creator.

He really is Almighty God. Paul goes on in Romans chapter 3 to say, For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And then in Romans 6, 23, For the wages of sin is death.

Here's the point. To think that you are entitled to God's blessings is contrary to every single thing the Bible teaches about what we truly deserve from God.

[5 : 06] You know, we should never we should never stop thinking about the fact that we don't deserve God's blessings. We really and truly it should never become just old news to us that we are sinners separated from God by our sin.

In fact, if we really know ourselves we know this is true. I mean, if you know yourself you know what's in your mind sometimes.

You know what's really some of the desires that you have at times. We know from experience not just from what the Scripture says that we really are sinners by nature.

as well as by choice. We need to learn to think of all the good things that we experience in life as being gifts of God's grace.

Just like Richard was singing about a moment ago. That means they are totally undeserved and they're unearned. You know, Paul contrasted what we deserve with what God has graciously given us through faith in Jesus in two of those passages that you see on the screen there.

[6 : 33] Let's expand the first one. Romans 3.23 to include verse 24. He said, For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified declared righteous declared right with Him by His grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

While we've all sinned and come short of the glory of God, we who are truly believers in Jesus, through faith in Him, God declares, You're right with me because Jesus has paid the penalty for our sins.

This is a gift from God through Jesus Christ. And then the next one. Romans 6.23 The full verse says this, For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We've got a lot to be thankful for every day of our lives. You know, a lot of times we spend our time thinking about what we don't have, complaining about what's wrong in our life.

We need to spend more time thinking about how we have been blessed and thinking about what is right in our life and really thinking about how we don't, a lot of times, we don't get what we deserve.

[7 : 59] Our salvation is a gift of God's grace. You didn't deserve it. Our salvation is God's free gift that you could never earn.

That leads to the next question. What are you thankful for? What are you, right now, thankful for? If we're Christians, we need to be the most thankful people on earth, not just on Thanksgiving Day, but every day because of what God has done for us in Christ.

Calling us to Himself through faith in Jesus, forgiving us, making us His child. That's at the top of the list. But what else are you thankful for?

What are you thankful for right now? We really need to give thanks for all that we have because it has been given to us by God.

[9 : 01] I want you to look at something that Paul said to the people in the church at Corinth. 1 Corinthians chapter 4 and verse 7. They were having problems in the church.

There was divisions. There was a lot of pride over being a part of this group or that group following this leader or that leader. And the way Paul sought to combat that is to remind them it's all, whatever you have, whoever you are, it's a gift from God.

Look at it. 1 Corinthians 4 verse 7. What do you have that you did not receive? If you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

When I read that first statement, what do you have that you did not receive? That's one of the most humbling statements found in the Bible. Paul was trying to put these people in their place.

He was trying to tell them, you have no reason to be proud. You have no reason to elevate certain leaders and think that because you're a part of their group, you're someone special.

[10 : 09] Everything that we are, everything that you are, that you're glad that you are, as well as everything that you have, comes from God.

Our abilities, our talents, our gifts, our opportunities, our blessings, they've all been given to us by God.

I want you to think about that. Every one of us, there's something in your life that you're extremely proud of. I can look around, some of you men, you greatly outmarried yourself.

Some of you who, that I know are going to get married, you're engaged, you're close to it. You really outpanted your coverage, boy. One in particular I'm looking at right there. You need to understand, it's not because you're so good looking.

Maybe because she's blind. But it may be, it's not because you're good looking, not because of this or that. In the big scheme of things, God has blessed you that way.

[11 : 24] If you've got a job that you just are thrilled to have, thank God for the ability that you have, for the opportunity, for whatever it is that He worked out to put you there.

Thank Him. Paul is asking this question with the obvious answer. What do you have that you did not receive? Obviously nothing.

If you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it? If we'll think deeply about this. I mean, let it really sink in. This will help us to avoid being arrogant, being prideful.

It will also help us to really and truly be thankful for whatever it is that we have because it's a gift from God. That's how God wants us to think.

He wants us to be thankful for all of life's good gifts, which leads us to the third question this morning. Who are you thankful to? Who are you thankful to?

[12:30] Now here's where we come to the real difference between Christians and unbelievers. There's a lot of people in the world who would consider themselves to be atheists or agnostics, but they're thankful to someone.

They're thankful for certain things. We who are Christians, we need to learn at the top of the list to be thankful to God because He really is the source of all the good that we experience in life.

Look at it as James tells us in chapter 1, verse 17. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

The Father of lights. He's talking about how the heavenly bodies, the sun, the moon, they change. At least we perceive change. The sun rises and sets.

The moon goes through different phases. But God is constant. God does not change. We can count on Him because of who He is and what He does.

[13:41] God is good in terms of who He is. In James chapter 1 in verse 13, prior to talking about how every good and gift comes from God, James had tried to help these people understand you never blame God for evil.

God is not the source of temptation in your life. Here's how He says it in James 1.13. Let no one say when he is tempted, I am being tempted by God.

For God cannot be tempted with evil and He Himself tempts no one. God cannot be tempted by evil and He cannot tempt anyone with evil because it's just contrary to who He is.

It's contrary to His nature. God is holy. He is above sin. He is immune to sin. And so evil is present in this world but we can't say this comes from God.

He's to blame for it. God is good in terms of who He is and God is good in terms of what He gives. He's never the source of evil, verse 13, and He only gives good gifts, verse 17, that you see.

[14:53] Because God is good like this, we can trust Him. He can be trusted as our Heavenly Father. We can have confidence in Him.

He's for us as His children. That brings up a question, doesn't it? It makes me think as well, what about all the things that happen in our lives that are not good?

There is plenty of evil in this world and you cannot deny it. Christians, a lot of times, suffer, experience all kinds of pain.

Well, Paul answers the question, what about all these kind of things in relation to God being good? Paul answers that question in various ways throughout his writings as well as the whole Bible.

But Paul answers that question in the context in 1 Thessalonians 5 of telling us to be thankful. I want you to look at it.

[15:59] 1 Thessalonians 5, 18, give thanks in all circumstances. Paul, as he's winding down that letter to that church, he tells them certain things they need to be doing, issues certain little short, brief commands.

And one of them is, give thanks in all circumstances. That does not mean, though, to thank God for evil. It does not mean that you thank God for things that are obviously contrary to His will, His design.

Suffering comes into our lives. We are touched by evil. Paul wants us to think when those times come, you don't thank God for the evil.

You don't thank God for the sinful things that people do. But you do thank God that He is sovereign. You do thank Him that He is good and that He is going to work everything out for His glory and ultimate good.

And I hope that brings to your mind, Romans 8, 28, one of the most comforting words from God in all the Bible.

[17:19] And we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love Him, who've been called according to His purpose. All things are not good.

There's a lot of terrible things, a lot of suffering and pain even Christians experience. We don't know why God allows these things. We don't see all that He actually does in bringing about ultimate good even.

But one of the ways that Romans 29 is talking about how God works everything for good, it goes on in verse 29 to talk about how God is working in our lives to conform us to the image of His Son. God is working in evil. He's working in pain and suffering to perfect us, our character, to make us more like His Son Jesus.

And so, in all of our circumstances, we can trust God that He is sovereign, He is in control, He is good, and He is powerfully working out good in our lives, if nothing else, but developing our Christ-like character.

[18 : 32] But He's also working out things for ultimate good that we may not even see until heaven one day. But we can trust that in all things, God is at work and He's working everything for His glory.

There's meaning, there is purpose, even in our sufferings. You know, one of the best examples of how we are to thank God for all things is found in the way that Paul thanked God for everything, including the good that He saw in people's lives.

I want you to look with me at Romans chapter 1 in verse 8. Romans is the first letter in the New Testament that the Apostle Paul wrote. If you open your New Testament, you'll see Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, then Romans.

Beginning with Romans, you're going to go through Paul's letters. In most of those letters, in the majority of those letters, he's going to begin by thanking God and then thank God for what he's doing in the lives of those people.

Let's look at two examples. Romans 1.8. First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.

[19 : 53] First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you. I'm thanking God. I'm thanking God for you and I'm thanking God for how you're living, how you're actually putting the gospel into practice, how you're living like Christians because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.

People are talking about you and they're talking about you good. You know, none of us really want people to talk about us but they're going to.

All of us are going to be talked about sooner or later, more or less. It's okay if they talk about us the good that God's doing in us and through us.

Another example, 1 Thessalonians chapter 1 verses 2 and 3. He's writing to this group of Christians. We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers. remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

[21 : 05] Paul thanked God for what he had done in these people's lives to save them, change them, and enable them to actually live like Christians in the midst of a tough world where most people were not Christians.

What Paul is doing, he's complimenting them. You see, Paul is writing this letter. He's not just praying to God privately where nobody will hear.

He's not just writing a personal letter that only one person is going to read. Paul is writing a letter that was to be read to the entire church and would be circulated among other Christian churches. And so what he's doing is he is publicly complimenting them. How they've responded, how they've developed a powerful testimony as God's people.

Paul said things like this, to praise God, give public thanks to God, but also to publicly affirm them, to encourage them, and yes, to thank them for their faithfulness.

[22 : 29] Another example we see real clear, 2 Thessalonians 1, verse 3. He says, We are always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.

What I want us to see is that this is a good example of how we ought to express gratitude to God, but also to others.

You and I, we need to do more than just be thankful to God. We need to thank God for people in our lives who are meaningful to us, but we need to learn to thank people.

expressing gratitude to people is something most of us need to put more emphasis on. Do you do that as a matter of habit in your home, for example?

You who are living at home with your parents, they do a lot for you. You may not acknowledge it, you may not appreciate it sometimes, but they do a lot for you.

[23 : 50] If nothing else, they're letting you live there. Probably not charging you a dime, and you cost something, you know? You're expensive. But what I want you to think about is, do you tell

them, boys and girls, young people, young adults, do you take the time to express thanks, appreciation, those people who are providing for most of your needs, and do you do it with sincerity?

You know, one reason we ought to do this is because it's just the right thing to do. But also, expressing gratitude helps us to develop better relationships.

It really does. It makes us more appreciative of the person who blesses us if we'll take time to think about just what all they've done for us.

It will make us more appreciative if we'll just stop and think of what the person who's helping us, taking care of us, doing stuff for us.

If we'll just stop and think what it is they're doing, what it costs them to do it. Maybe in terms of time, maybe in terms of energy, not necessarily monetarily.

[25 : 25] Do you know that it's really a reward for you to take time to give thanks to somebody who is investing in you?

It's not just among family members, but all of us. Have you ever had somebody to give you something? Maybe it was a gift, maybe it was their time, they just gave you something, and you thought to yourself, it is important.

They've really given of themselves, and you may think under some of those circumstances, I want to pay them back. If somebody has given you something because they just love you, and they wanted to give it to you, they don't want to be paid back.

You'll insult them if you talk about paying them back. You know what would be their greatest reward? For you to look them in the eye and smile and express genuine appreciation, thanks, hug them, touch them, do it from the heart, do it with all sincerity.

That will reward them more than you would ever imagine. that's really a lot of times. You think about when you give to someone you really care about, you're not expecting anything in return, but it makes it all worthwhile when they look at you and that smile or that touch and they express gratitude for what you've done.

[27 : 12] Let's conclude with one final question. why do you thank God? Why do you thank God assuming that we all in here do?

If you give someone a gift at Christmas or you just do something for someone, period, would you be satisfied if that person just only gave you an obliging word of thanks but didn't show any interest or affection to you as a person?

You do something, you give something and someone doesn't really, they don't really acknowledge you. They may acknowledge your gift, but they don't acknowledge you.

Sometimes it makes you feel hurt, doesn't it? In some situations you can feel insulted or you can just feel used.

Hearing words of thanks don't mean anything unless they include your genuine personal interest that you express somehow as you give that word of thanks.

[28 : 39] God feels the same way when we are more interested in His gifts than we are in Him. Are you thankful to God not just for the things or the people He puts into your life?

Are you truly thankful to God God? God because you love Him and you want to express gratitude to Him just because you love Him.

You want Him to know that you are thankful for that special person, for that job, for that gift, whatever it may be. True gratitude to God can only be expressed from someone who has a heart for God.

and that heart for God has to be developed in the context of a loving relationship with Him. We cannot truly thank God if we don't know Him, if we don't have a relationship with Him through Jesus Christ.

So I want to ask you now, do you have such a relationship with God? Do you want one if you don't? You can have such a relationship, it can begin today by admitting to God, just like we said at the beginning, that I am a sinner.

[30 : 05] And I know that I have come short of your expectations. I know that I have failed you. I know that I have been more self-centered than God-centered. Admit your sin.

Express your sorrow to God for having dishonored Him, ignored Him, and sinned against Him like this. Turn from your sin. Change your mind about it. Put your faith in Jesus, that when He died on the cross, He actually paid the penalty for your sin.

Call upon Him to save you, forgive you, make you a child of God. Do that now. You can begin a relationship with Him. For some people in this room, the question is this.

Did you once have a relationship with God that was close? It was loving. It was real. It was personal. But now, it's just distant.

It's just not really personal anymore. Maybe you're even reading the Bible regularly. Maybe your relationship with God is more along the lines of being academic rather than anything else.

[31 : 18] My question is, do you want to come back to Him? Do you want Him to restore for you the joy of your salvation? If you know why there's separation, why there's distance, confess that to God, you repent of it.

And the Scripture says if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us. He'll give us a fresh start. He'll welcome you back. Could be that you would say that I don't really know why.

It's just happened over time or something, but I just don't have the close personal relationship with the Lord that I once had. Just tell Him that. You don't have to know why.

Just come back to Him. Scripture says if we will draw near to God, He'll draw near to us. Ask God to show you what the problem is. To show you what the solution is.

But the beginning part of that solution is to come back to Him. Humble yourself. Seek Him. Commit yourself and you are fresh to Him. I want to end this message with the words from Psalm 100.

[32 : 33] The only psalm that is entitled is a psalm of thanksgiving. It's actually entitled a psalm for giving thanks. The last two verses are this.

Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him and bless praise His name.

For the Lord is good and His love endures forever. His faithfulness continues through all generations.

Thank God and praise Him because of who He is. Because He is our good God who will love us forever and who will be faithful to us forever and ever.

would you pray with me? Father, Father, Father, show us how we should respond so that we can leave here today as people who are truly thankful.

[33 : 46] We're thankful to You for who You are, how You are, and what You do. But Lord, help us to also leave here as people who are thankful for the people You've put in our life who bless us, who help us.

Help us, Father, to be thankful for the gifts, the talents, the opportunities, the things that we have and enjoy.

Lord, help us, Father, to be thankful even in the tough times, the hard times, because we know You are sovereign and You are good and You're working in all those tough times for Your glory and our good.

Father, show us how we should respond. Help us to do that now and leave here as Your thankful people. Let's just continue in an attitude of prayer and you respond to the Lord as He speaks.

If I could help you, pray with you, I'll be here at the front and be happy to do that.