

The Year of Gratitude

Psalm 46:8-11

A kindergarten teacher gave her class a "show and tell" assignment. Each student was instructed to bring in an object to share with the class that represented their religion.

The first student got up in front of the class and said, "My name is Benjamin, and I am Jewish and this is a Star of David."

The second student got up in front of the class and said, "My name is Mary. I'm a Catholic and this is a Rosary."

The third student got in up front of the class and said, "My name is Tommy. I am an Evangelical, and this is a casserole."

Today is the last Sunday of the year. I know, breaking news, right? So, today we want to come together and see what the Lord has done.

Psalm 46:8-11, "Come and see what the Lord has done, the desolations he has brought on the earth. 9

He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth. He breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire. 10 He says, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." 11 The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress."

As we look at the year in review do we see our troubles, or do we see what the Lord has done? How we look back reveals how our focus is set. If we are focused on trouble that is what we will see, but if our focus is on the Lord, we should see Him in all that has gone on.

Today I want to share with you 5 ways to view God in gratitude.

- I. Give thanks for all things, in all circumstances.

Ephesians 5:20, "always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Always and everything is pretty all encompassing, isn't it? But does He really mean everything?

1 Thessalonians 5:18, “give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

Not only is it everything but in all circumstances. It’s easy to give thanks when things turn out great. It’s fairly easy to give thanks when you have a near miss. Something could have turned out horribly, but it didn’t and you can wipe the sweat from your brow knowing you just avoided catastrophe!

But the verse said “all circumstances” didn’t it? This leads to the second way to view God in gratitude:

II. In suffering

Paul writes in:

Romans 5:3-5, “Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”

This sounds familiar doesn’t it. Only a few weeks ago in our first message from the book of James we read:

James 1:2-4, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. 4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”

Both Paul and James teach us that when we suffer, we develop perseverance and that produces character, maturity and hope.

We aren’t impressed with stories of how someone simply inherited millions at the passing of a relative. That isn’t the great American success story.

Colonel Sanders who took his first retirement check and started Kentucky Fried Chicken. That’s a story we can get excited about.

The most meaningful race I ever ran was finishing my first 100 mile race because it was hard. It was more fulfilling than winning my district mile or becoming an all American in college track not because it was easy, but because it took everything I had to complete it.

I was so spent when I was signing the finishers banner, I had to ask the guys around me what year it

was I was so completely spent. That made it sweet because I had to suffer to complete this race.

What do you appreciate the most, something you were given or something you had to work hard for? That is what Paul and James are teaching us here.

Romans is my favorite book in the Bible. So, notice Paul's words in verse 5, "because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."

God's love has been poured out into our hearts. Do we understand that? God is pouring His love in the suffering because it makes us like Jesus. Becoming like Jesus is the bomb! This is great!

So, how does God do this in us? Verse 5 keeps going, "through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."

The work of the Holy Spirit is to make us like Jesus. This is why Jesus was excited to leave because He knew what the Holy Spirit was going to do in us.

We don't have to "be better" we just need to work with the Holy Spirit who will make us better. Do you see the difference in this? It isn't up to us; we just need to put the car into cruise control because the Holy Spirit is the operating system.

The third way to view God in gratitude:

III. Do everything in the name of Jesus out of a spirit of gratefulness

Colossians 3:15-17, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16 Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

We could do an entire sermon series just on these 3 verses.

Those phrases, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts" and "Let the message of Christ dwell among you" show us that we are to be centered on Christ in our thoughts. Is Christ the center of your life? If He is not, what is? When something else is the center of your life it is what has control of you.

1 Corinthians 10:31, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."

How are you doing with that? Do your actions bring glory to God? If not, what must change?

The fourth way to view God in gratitude:

IV. In the unknown

Philippians 4:6-7, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

How cool is that? No matter what is happening in our lives we have the tools to engage it with peace. We do it with prayer and thanksgiving! Not complaining, not grumbling, not pouting, not trying to get others to side with us in our discontent. No, we pray and give thanks, and we accept the peace that God gives.

If you tell me, you are anxious or are suffering from anxiety what do you think I should tell you?

Psalms 118:29, “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.”

This goes back to what is your attitude in life. Do you have an attitude of gratitude?

The fifth way to view God in gratitude is:

V. For Salvation

Colossians 1:12, “and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.”

You see, God is the one who qualified you to share in eternal life. It isn't from some work we do. We weren't so good that God had to take us into heaven. No one is that good except Jesus. No, he qualified us, it's by His work. He did it and He deserves all the credit for His work.

As we grow in the Lord, we gain that ability to give thanks in our suffering. We see this progression here in:

Colossians 2:6-7, “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, 7 rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.”

Grow strong in your faith so that you too can finish the race God has laid out for you.

Hebrews 12:1-3, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

Jesus suffered to the point of death on the cross, will you ask for an easier race to run? Or will you run the race God has given you and honor Him and bring glory to Him by running it well?