

The Cause and Effect of Thankfulness / COB / 11.22.15

- † **[Slide 1: Blank]** Good morning! How many of you like the holiday Thanksgiving? What do you like best about it? Food, family, friends, football make Thanksgiving one of my favorite days of the year!
- The Pilgrims, poor slob, had not invented football, but they engaged in other games of skill and chance, and they ate and partied for three days with their native friends, as they celebrated their thankfulness for the good harvest which would keep them alive through the winter.
 - It is highly unlikely that they ate turkey. The writings of the Pilgrims show they were impressed with the running speed of the long-legged birds in the woods, but not one of their writings ever mentions eating them. At their Thanksgiving feast, they ate duck, goose, venison, clams and other shell fish, eels, white bread, corn bread, leeks, watercress, wild plums, and dried berries.
 - They sailed to America to start a fishing colony, but when they arrived, they found they had forgotten to bring any nets or fishhooks, and nobody in their group actually knew how to fish.
 - You might be surprised to learn that they celebrated in October, they almost certainly did not land at Plymouth Rock, and they loved beer while hating plain water.
 - According to historian George Willison, they were stubborn, opinionated, and passionate people, who were much given to asking God why he stuck them with so many other people who were stubborn, opinionated, and passionate!
- † **[Slide 2: Thesis]** That hits a little close to home for me, so let us move on! It now is our time of Thanksgiving, so I want to share with you something about the cause and effect of thankfulness.
- My thesis is that we should cultivate thankfulness in ourselves because it will lead to an inner peace that transcends the ups and downs of life. We all want that sense of peace, don't we?
 - And I maintain we can be thankful because we have hope; so the key is to see why we can have hope; because this source will bring us hope which will empower us to be thankful which will result in inner peace. Let me pray briefly, and then I will try to show this to you in Scripture.

Thankfulness Leads to Inner Peace

- † **[Slide 3: Philippians 4.6-7]** **Philippians 4.6-7 NET: Do not be anxious about anything. Instead, in every situation, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, tell your requests to God. And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.**
- This is a command – we are to pray and be thankful, and not be anxious – easier said than done, right? But let's consider this. Paul was teaching the Philippians *how* to give up anxiety. They were anxious about their standing before God, because they had anxiety in their lives from persecution and from other worldly pressures just like we have, so Paul provided them with an antidote to anxiety.
 - What does he say? In every situation, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, tell your requests to God. The word translated "petition" here, δέησις in Greek, meant an urgent request for God to meet a need. We are to be thankful even as we express our dependence on God for deliverance. Even when we are in an emotional pit or struggling with real life circumstances, desperately crying out to God, begging God for help, even then we are to be thankful.

- Why? Because cultivating thankfulness in the midst of adversity will bring us an inner peace that will guard our hearts and minds, that will protect us from veering off the top line path of faith and obedience, into the bottom line of sinfully relying on worldly ways of coping.
- As we remind ourselves of how thankful we are – as we count our worldly blessings and remember the source of our hope – our existing problems will seem more manageable, we will trust more in God, and thus we will experience God’s peace inside, and rest easy in his care.
- Truth is transformative. If we reflect even on only our earthly blessings – the provision of food, a place to stay, friends and family, a good church community, even entertainment like football; and I hope you have many other blessings besides – if we reflect on these blessings, then thankfulness wells up in us, and that helps us realize that God is with us, that we can trust him to see us through our struggles, and that there is more to life than just the struggle, there are good things too.
- Sometimes as a pastor, I feel like a Pilgrim who came to fish without a net or hook. It can be stressful, and that’s only 98% your fault, I take responsibility for the other 2%. This week, when LeeAnn and I were praying one morning, she expressed the struggle of being a pastor’s wife; and she prayed about her frustration with a seemingly intractable problem at work; and she prayed about her deep sadness at not being blessed with children; but she also prayed thankfulness. She is thankful for her relationship with God, her relationship with me [as challenging as I am], her job, our nice house, the cats, even the opportunity to do battle another day.
- I thought of Celia when I practiced this sermon. She is grieving the death of her sister, Darlene; she is in a lot of physical pain every day; she has some other sources of stress and anxiety in her life right now, and those clench up her muscles and make the pain even worse; yet even as she is crying out to God, desperate for his help, she can be thankful, for her son and his wife in the house, for her pets, for her loving church, and more. Praying thankfulness for those blessings helps her sense God’s love and assurance that he is with her, which helps her feel at peace.

† **[Slide 4: Colossians 3.15-17] Colossians 3.15-17 NET: Let the peace of Christ be in control in your heart (for you were in fact called as one body to this peace), and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and exhorting one another with all wisdom, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, all with grace in your hearts to God. And whatever you do in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.**

- Peace will reign in us if we are thankful; and that peace and that thankfulness will grow if we stay focused on the truth of God’s revelation in scripture, if we encourage one another with teachings and songs comprised of that scriptural truth.
- So private reflection on thankfulness is one step, but another is communal expression of thankfulness toward God. We come together weekly to rejoice and worship together, and to encourage each other with our songs, our praises, our teachings, and our loving fellowship. We should make time to express our thanks and praise to God in the presence of others, for to glorify him in this way will help us to experience thankfulness and peace.
- Sure the desired effect of complete inner peace is not always immediate, like throwing a switch; sometimes it is, but sometimes it is not enough to just say, “Ok, I choose to be thankful instead of anxious!” But we do have to throw that switch, make that choice; we do have to choose not to wallow in our troubles, rather counting our blessings. If we cultivate thankfulness day by day, following the instructions of scripture, then over time we will see a vast difference in ourselves.

Hope Leads to Thankfulness

- † **[Slide 5: Psalm 119.49-50]** The reason God's truth can help us experience thankfulness and peace is that it gives us hope. Let's look at a passage from Psalm 119 which connects these ideas.
- **Psalm 119.49-50 NET: Remember [O God] your word to your servant, for you have given me hope. This is what comforts me in my trouble, for your promise revives me.**
 - God's truth, especially God's promise for us, brings us hope, and that hope will comfort and revive us, making thankfulness possible.
 - So we reflect on not just earthly blessings like clothing, cars, kitty cats, and video games, but also what scripture teaches us about the blessings of God's unconditional love and acceptance for us, the assurance we have that God has adopted us and will never forsake us, the promise that God will see us through our struggles and eventually deliver us into something better.
- † **[Slide 6: Romans 15.4]** Paul wrote something similar in **Romans 15.4 NET: For everything that was written in former times [in what we call the Old Testament] was written for our instruction, so that through endurance and through encouragement of the scriptures we may have hope.**
- When I was down and out, living by handouts and credit card debt, lonely and depressed, it was only turning to God in prayer and clinging to his revelation in the Bible that helped me have hope. Sex, alcohol, television, striking out, and any other worldly way of coping could only whitewash my problems, mask them and make them tolerable for a while, but none of them could help me and most would cause damage. But when I prayerfully reflected on scripture, I felt the stirrings of hope, and that made it possible for me to be thankful even amidst my pain. I could feel thankful that I was alive, that God loved me, and that I would get better.
 - If we endure in God's Word, if we endure by God's word, then God's Word will encourage us and give us hope. Why? because scripture teaches us truth about God, about how he views us, about even a right perspective on our present suffering... but mostly because scripture teaches us about God's big promise. Let's look at that promise, because that is the source of our hope.

The Gospel Promise leads to Hope

- † **[Slide 7: 1 Peter 1.3-6: mercy, grace, birth]** **1 Peter 1.3-6 NET: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he gave us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, that is, into an inheritance imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. It is reserved in heaven for you, who by God's power are protected through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. This brings you great joy, although you may have to suffer for a short time in various trials.**
- Peter was writing to people who had been ripped out of their homes and lives in Rome, exiled into rural areas of what we call Turkey, and now were being persecuted by the locals there. They were suffering, but he told them they could have joy and hope even while suffering in this life, because they had God's gospel promise. They already had received God's mercy and grace, resulting in a spiritual rebirth!
 - **[Slide 8: inheritance and protection]** In this new spiritual life, they knew they had a guaranteed inheritance, first in Heaven and then in resurrection on the renewed Earth!

- And this salvation was protected by God's power, so they need never worry that their earthly suffering reflected abandonment by God. No matter what happened to them, it was not an indication that God had stopped loving them or they had somehow lost their salvation.
- We too should find hope and joy in these reflections! I said earlier that reflection on the truth could bring us hope, and this is why: because the truth of God's revelation in scripture contains the gospel promise.

† **[Slide 9: Romans 5.1-6: helpless]** Romans 5.1-6 NET: Therefore, since we have been declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in the hope of God's glory. Not only this, but we also rejoice in sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance, character, and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

- Paul says "while we were still helpless": you know, we all deserve to go to Hell, because we all were born with corrupted human natures, we all have walked away from God at times through lack of faith or disobedience, and we all are part of the failure of mankind to reflect God's character and represent him on the Earth. We all were mired in sin, influenced by evil, and yet God chose to love us, to save us, anyway.
- Paul says Christ died for us, the ungodly. Christ is the divine Son of God, part of the Godhead of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each distinct from the others in personality and action, yet so unified in essence and will and character that they are considered one God. The Son of God came from Heaven to earth to be born as the human baby Jesus, to fulfill the prophecies about a Messiah-savior; this is what we celebrate at Christmas.
- Jesus was what we were intended to be, a pure person; he lived as we were intended to live, always reflecting God the Father's character, always representing God the Father, always the sinless agent of God the Father's will. Then he died on the cross for us.
- Being a sinless person made him a worthy sacrifice for us. Because he also was divine, on the cross he was able to take on the penalty for all our sin, he was able to bear all the condemnation from God the Father that we deserve. And on the third day, he was resurrected from the dead to prove his identity, his victory, and God the Father's acceptance of this sacrifice on our behalf.
- **[Slide 10: righteousness/faith/love]** Paul says we have been declared righteous by faith. Only God can save the ungodly, it is totally an act of his grace. What he asks of us is that we believe in his gospel promise, a promise that begins in Genesis right after mankind's fall into sin, prophetically grows throughout the Old Testament, and comes to realization in Christ and to clarity in the New Testament writings about him. If we can believe in God's offer of salvation through Christ, then he will declare us righteous in his sight, even though we still are tainted.
- This is the love that has been poured out upon us, that we received grace and mercy instead of the condemnation we deserved, we received peace with God instead of God's wrath; and we received the Holy Spirit to indwell us, guide us, strengthen us, comfort us, sanctify or purify us over our lifetime, and guarantee that we persevere in faith until we reach the complete fulfillment of God's promise for us.
- **[Slide 11: rejoice]** Because God's love does not disappoint, does not fail, our hope also does not disappoint. Paul says, we rejoice in the hope of God's glory, knowing that God glorifies

himself by redeeming [or freeing] people like us. We can be thankful, even rejoicing, amidst our suffering, because we know that through it God will draw us closer to himself and make himself known, and this will strengthen our hope.

Conclusion: We can be Thankful and have Peace because we have Hope for Salvation

- † **[Slide 12: Colossians 2.6-7]** Let's look at one more passage: **Colossians 2.6-7 NET: Therefore, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and firm in your faith just as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.**
 - Faith in the gospel promise gives us hope even in our hard times, and that hope empowers us to be overflowing with thankfulness, and our thankfulness will give us a sense of inner peace. I pray this will be fully realized in all of us in the coming year. Right now, let's pray together...