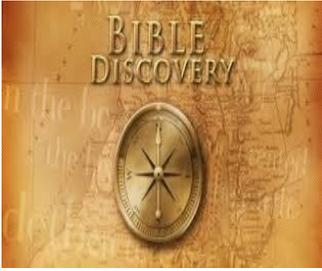


God is Special, Thank Him Only



What a joy today to give thanks to God! How do you give thanks? What are you thankful to God for this year? For our church, we've had a busy year; especially these last few weeks. We've celebrated, we've shed some tears, we've looked back, and we've planned for the future. Today we celebrate having arrived at our new beginning as the people of *Mt Brydges Baptist Church*. Have we questions? I'm sure we do. Have we uncertainties – where to find things, where to put things, what are we to do? *Absolutely!* But for today our thoughts – our focus – is on thanking our Heavenly Father who has brought us through all that we've encountered. Today we enter into new opportunities to serve God, new reasons to praise God, deeper appreciation to give thanks to our God. Thanksgiving should permeate our speech, our songs, our prayers, and our hearts. Why is giving thanks to God important? Is it not because of who God is! There's no one like God! There's no one like our Wonderful Lord! There's no one before Him; there'll be no one after Him! He is eternal. He's the creator who's in control of everything that is. He's the all-knowing – before time began through all eternity. Nothing compares with His greatness! Little wonder so many verses in His Word, the Bible, command us to give thanks to God.

- Psalms 106:1; 107:1; 118:1; 1 Chronicles 16:34 all tell us, *"Praise the Lord. Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, His love endures forever."*
- At 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Paul implores us, *"Be joyful always, pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."*

The Bible repeatedly stresses the importance of giving thanks.

- *"Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving"* [Psalm 50:14].
- *"Let them give thanks to the Lord for His loving-kindness, and for His wonders to the sons of men! Let them also offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, and tell of His works with joyful singing"* [Psalm 107:21–22].
- *"Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father"*. [Colossians 3:17]

In Canada, our Federal Government set the third Monday of October as the day in which we were to pause and give thanks to God. Prior to the 1950's when this was instituted, many parts of Canada celebrated at different times in the year. Whether we choose to thank God – to praise God - or not, the Word of God is *powerful*. Paul said the *"Scriptures give us hope and encouragement as we wait patiently for God's promises to be fulfilled."* [Romans 15:4] Scripture reveals the heart and wisdom of God; it *"never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God"*. [2 Peter 1:21] Because of the impact of God's Word on our hearts, we're instructed and inspired to truly lift our spirits pointing others to God's ways through our praise. These verses, along with many others, give reason for why we should, indeed must, thank our Heavenly Father as we repeat from the heart such verses as...

- *"His love endures forever"; "He is good"* [Psalm 118:29];
- *"His mercy is everlasting"* [Psalm 100:5].
- We're instructed to *"give thanks to God the Father for everything"* [Ephesians 5:20]
- Even as we remember to give *"thanks to God for His indiscernible gift"* [2 Corinthians 9:15]

Meaning Jesus our Saviour who died for our sins, set us free from the captivity of the evil one, and reunited us with His Father, our Lord God.

As we enter to give God praise, to lift our voices, our hands *and* our hearts; as we come in to worship, we're reminded thanksgiving and praise always go hand in hand – we can't begin to adequately praise and worship God except we *begin* being truly thankful. I've been told the secret to the Christian life is one of commitment, but commitment to a belief without any emotional tie to the relationship through your heart leaves you dry,

thirsty, cracked and broken. Yes, we need committed Christians but we need committed Christians who're truly *thankful* for God, *thankful* to God; able & willing to demonstrate with thanksgiving from the heart. Listen to the Apostle Paul's instruction on our thankfulness to God... "*Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For He has rescued us from the domain of darkness, and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*" [Colossians 1:12-14] The Apostle Paul certainly can get emotional! Praise God that we can too!

Giving thanks to God is too often relegated to a minor, mundane role within the Christian life – fitted into our routine with little thought or effort applied. True, we give thanks at our meals and hopefully when we receive some wonderful windfall, but is it heartfelt? We're often much quicker, and much more earnest at bringing God *our* concerns, *our* problems, *our* disappointments, *our* wants while much more reticent in coming to Him with our heartfelt thanks. Is it we forget to look back and see the wonderful way in which God has answered our prayers? If we would truly look back and see the footprints of our Saviour spread upon the pathways of our life, we'd sing and shout from the rooftops and jump over fences with joy.

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Giving thanks also reminds us of how much we have – the privileges we enjoy simply because we've been born to this part of the world. Yet less than 8% of the world knows the blessings we take for granted every day. If we'd be the thankful people of God; if we'd display our thanks continually as we're called by God to do; if we'd fully comprehend that all we have, all we are, all we ever will be is a gift of God's wonderful grace, we couldn't help but live our lives very differently than we currently do. Without giving thanks, without gratefulness to God on a continual basis, we become arrogant, self-centered, believing we've achieved everything on our own. We become myopic, near-sighted. We're the kings and queens of our own mountains. The Bible teaches failing to give thanks characterizes the wicked. One indictment of unbelievers is that "*even though they knew God, they did not honour Him as God, or give thanks.*" [Romans 1:21] Conversely, thankfulness keeps our hearts in a right relationship with our Lord God remembering we're saved by grace, through faith which is also a gift of God; blessed as those who've looked intently into the perfect law of Jesus Christ, saying

Thankfulness keeps our hearts in a right relationship with our Lord God

yes to His salvation, continuing to do what it says. Feeling and expressing appreciation isn't only good for us, it's the only fitting response to such a marvelous God who's given us new life through the broken body and spilt blood of His Own Son paying the price for our sins. God wants us to learn to be thankful for all the gifts He's given us. When we start thanking Him for things we usually take for granted, our perspective changes; we realize we couldn't exist without the wonderful, gracious, magnificent, merciful blessings of God.

Of course in our world today, as there's always been, there are naysayers, cynics who've lost their perspective of who God is, or who think God has somehow forgotten them. They "*forfeit God's abounding grace that could be theirs*" choosing to "*cling to their idols*" [Jonah 2:8] What about you? Have you ever had those thoughts? Are you perhaps thinking it today? The doubt slips in and you find yourself considering, "*Can it really be that this unique, great God, creator of all the universe has time for me; that he hasn't become so great that he no longer cares about His people?*" Let me assure you categorically, "**NO**"! He's simply too great; too loving; too all-knowing to fail any of us! He cannot fail us. He cannot forget us. He never grows old or tired; His eternal understanding is beyond the depths of all human reason. To the Philippians the Apostle Paul, who constantly gave thanks to God in His prayers and with every petition he made to his listeners, and practiced what he preached, wrote, "*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*" [Philippians 4:6] That must become the mindset by which

we too approach God's throne of grace just as in our scripture today the writer of Hebrews encourages us to do.

How do we enter bringing praise and thanksgiving to God?

The question then becomes, "How do we enter bringing praise and thanksgiving to God?" The Hebrews writer opens for us the answer from our Heavenly Father. We've a relationship with the High Priest – the *great priest over the house of God* through whom we're invited to enter through His shed blood into the inner sanctum, the Most Holy Place, the presence of God our Heavenly Father. This is both a new and a living way. It's new because Jesus created a completely new means of having relationship with God. It's living because this way's undeniably, inexplicably bound with Jesus Himself. It's a reminder, as the Apostle John instructs that Jesus is the way! In Jesus, we've an audience with God Himself as we bring our thanksgiving, lift our praises, and surrender in worship to our Almighty King.

"How do we enter bringing praise and thanksgiving to God?" We enter with sincere hearts having been set free from the stain of sin, redeemed, cleansed from a guilty conscience, washed with pure water through Jesus Christ. It's a further reminder that we, as Christians, are most thankful for the finished work of Christ. We don't wait for salvation. We don't endure in slim hope tomorrow brings a new life. We give thanks **because** Christ *died for us* and we're now new creatures in Him, able to fellowship with the Father now and forevermore.

As we enter in to bring our praise and thanksgiving to God *what response does that cause us to bring* in our thanksgiving? Again, returning to Hebrews 10, we're instructed to:

1. "Hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful."

We're to be thankful not only for the things we like, but for the circumstances we *don't* like. We don't thank Him for evil, but that He's sustaining us through it. [James 1:12] We don't thank Him for harm He didn't cause, but thank Him He gives us the strength to endure it [2 Corinthians 12:9] When we purpose to thank God for *everything* recognizing "*in all things God works for the good of those who love Him*" [Romans 8:28], we keep bitterness at bay. We have thankful hearts toward God even though we're not thankful for the circumstance. We grieve yet remain thankful. We hurt yet remain thankful. We're angry at sin yet still thankful to God. We've nothing to fear or regret as all our hope is rightly placed in our Heavenly Father. We've assurance because we know when God makes a promise, He keeps it. So, knowing God has taken the initiative in making the promise of salvation, the assurance of eternity with all who receive His Son Jesus as Lord and Saviour, anointing all who follow Him with His Holy Spirit, we know God fulfills all He's promised and we do not fear no matter what befalls us.

2. "Consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds."

Because of the great love of God poured out on us, we're encouraged to work together with one another, "*spurring each other on*" despite circumstances we're asked to endure. We're called to do this as a mutual activity, one in which as believers we support one another, not where the elite direct the rest as to what they're to do. We're called into a thankful family. To be family in the best sense of the word. To "spur" in the original Greek normally meant irritation or exasperation, making its positive use here even more astounding. In short in our "Christlikeness" we're to provoke one another to love. This is the most important Christian ingredient, the most essential obligation arising out of thankful hearts.

Finally, if we look back to the final messages of Joshua where he challenges the people of God to remain faithful to God we find a great recipe for remaining thankful people. In their day, in their land, as in our modern times, there were many gods vying for their attention. But Joshua calls them to task, speaking for the Lord God, encouraging them to do two concurrent things –

- **"Put away forever the idols"**

Meaning all the false gods, the tempting alluring things in our lives which divert us from giving all worship, praise and thanksgiving to God alone; and

- ***“Fear the LORD and serve Him wholeheartly...serve the LORD alone!”***

It's a reminder to you and me this day we too are not called to make God our number one god which would allow for many "other gods" in our lives. Absolutely not! Our God's justly a jealous God, He's the God alone who's created all things; He alone is worthy of our praise; He alone is the Living God; He alone has saved us from our sins. Therefore we give Him praise, we thank Him with all our heart and we choose to serve Him.

If we would be a thankful people we must have our God as the One and Only God we serve, the One and Only God we worship. Joshua sternly gives warning, *“If you abandon the LORD, and serve other gods, He will turn against you.”* [Joshua 24:20] The choice is ours to make. If we choose to praise the Lord and serve Him, if we choose to come with thankful hearts as sacrifices of praise this day, digging into God's Word each and every day of our lives, sharing it openly with others then we have seeds of wisdom and inspiration planted not only in others but within our own hearts, we discover biblical promises and principles taking root, and we find that faith begins to flourish – the fruit of the Spirit-filled life begins to ripen and we overflow with thankfulness.

Please understand that if we've surrendered to Jesus, put HIM first in our lives every day, we've the One who made us, the One who loves us; the One who provides for us. We've the Only One able to meet our needs, to lift us not only from the miry pit but to set our feet on the solid rock, firmly established for all eternity with our Heavenly Father. Thank God He understands our fickleness; He patiently yet eagerly awaits us to come and give Him thanks. Will you join me today? Give us a call or send an email. We'd love to hear from you.

Blessings,

Pastor Dave