



The Power of Thankfulness

Pastor Jerry Gillis
November 27, 2016

So recently I read a story about Rudyard Kipling. Maybe you've heard of him. He is the Nobel prize for literature recipient who wrote The Jungle Book, along with dozens and dozens of other published and acclaimed short stories and poems. Now whether the story is urban legend or whether it's true, I wasn't able to quite track down, but the story goes like this.

There was a reporter who wanted to interview Mr. Kipling at the height of his success. He was probably the most renowned American writer at that time and had broad acclaim even in Europe and elsewhere. And so the reporter wanted to interview him and spend some time with him at the height of his success. And the reporter had actually computed that his writing was so famous and that he had been paid so much money, that he was actually worth \$100 a word in terms of what he had written. In that day, that was a big deal.

And so, he finally quite up with Mr. Kipling and had the opportunity to interview him and he told him, he said, "Sir, I've calculated that you are worth \$100 a published word." Mr. Kipling just responded with a shrug

and then the reporter said to him, I want to take this \$100 bill, and the reporter took out a \$100 bill, gave it to Mr. Kipling, and said, "Now I want you to give me one of your \$100 words." Mr. Kipling took the bill and he folded it over and he put it in his pocket and he said, "Thanks".

I think it would be fair to say that thanks is a \$100 word. In our economy, and probably in our culture it's probably more like \$1,000 or million dollar word. You know what it feels like when that word should have been expressed but wasn't, don't you? When you held a door for someone at the mall and they walked through like it was your job. Nothing, right? If you're like me, occasionally in my head or under my breath when they come through after I've held the door for them, I'll just be like, oh, you're welcome. My pleasure. No, it's a delight. Glad to be here. I'll be here all day. It's my job. My job. I occasionally do that which is actually the wrong way to respond, but that just happens inside of my heart on occasion.

Or maybe that gift that you gave to someone and they did not respond at all. Gave you nothing. No response, no nothing. Or maybe moms, you cleaned up your teenage kids' rooms for them one time even though you'd been on them and you wanted to show them what grace looked like, but you still thought maybe they would thank you and they didn't. At all. In fact, they were like why didn't you wash my clothes? You know, and so you're kind of going, o.k., I don't know what's the deal. Or maybe you went over and above at work or maybe over and above at school and no one noticed, no one said anything, no one thanked you.

Often we understand that when that's missing that something is missing for us. I think it would be fair to say, wouldn't it, that thanks is powerful. I think that would be a fair thing to say. You could say it this way: Thanks are powerful, depending on how you are giving them. Giving thanks is powerful.

Do you know there's people that study the power of thankfulness as a science? There's a guy named Robert Emmons who's a Ph.D. in psychology who is a professor at the University of California - Davis. And he's actually written a number of books on the scientific research which he's done exhaustive studies on how thankfulness or a posture of gratitude actually positively affects you physically, psychologically, and socially. And he's got the research to back all of that up. It makes sense, right? I mean even though he's discovering something in that way it just makes sense to us that are followers of God that that would be something that would affect us positively.

There's also great thinkers in history who have given a lot of time to thinking about the idea of gratitude and thankfulness and have come to some very unique conclusions. Like, G.K. Chesterton who actually came up - he's a brilliant apologist, British apologist and literary critic who just thinks beautiful thoughts. Here's what Chesterton said about the idea of thankfulness. He said, "I do not, in my private capacity, believe that a baby gets his best physical food by sucking his thumb; nor that a man gets his best moral food by sucking his soul, and denying its dependence on God and other good things. I would maintain that thanks are the highest form of thought, and that gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder."

I like how Chesterton thinks, and he's not the only great thinker that has ever thought of this, because when we look at some of the Psalmists and their writing, they were not only great thinkers, but they were great feelers as well. And one of the Psalms that I want to point out and call to our attention today is Psalm 100. It's very short. It's only five verses. It's just a handful of verses and I want us to look at that. In fact, it's the only Psalm that you have in your Bible that is actually labeled as a song of thanksgiving. Or a song of grateful praise. It's something like that. It's in the little margin right before the Psalm starts.

Now if you're new to The Chapel, we encourage you to bring a Bible along with you, and I don't care if it's a paper copy or a digital copy. It doesn't matter. We would encourage you to do that. Now those who come to The Chapel, you know that I'll put the Scriptures up on the screen for us all to be able to see and access and those kinds of things which is great, because a lot of times people are new and they're kicking the tires, trying to figure out what's what. And so we want to make it accessible for everyone and so I'll put that up on the screen for our use. But you can't take the screens home with you. And so we encourage you to actually get to know your own copy of the Bible - whether that's digital or paper it doesn't really matter to me. I don't care.

Now if you have zero interest in doing that, then here's what I want to tell you. You have zero interest in getting to know God. Zero. Because you will not get to know God outside of how He's revealed Himself. And He reveals Himself in His word. So I encourage you - you may not have it with you today - I understand. I'm not throwing stones at you or anything. I just

encourage you to bring something with you that you can access, and you can start to get to understand how to navigate and find your place around, because this is what you need to be able to use.

I've had some people say to me from time to time, well, Jerry, you tell me what I need to know. You teach me what I need to know about God. So what you're saying is that you're comfortable sucking on a pacifier and drinking a milk bottle for the rest of your life. Even as a grown person, you're comfortable with that. That's what you want. You want people to identify that, because that's what you're saying. When you're saying that you want a parent to do all of the feeding for your entire life, that's what you're saying. We want you to grow and develop and mature. And so ultimately, I want you to have access to your own copy of the word of God and be able to have some facility around it. Now, that said - if you're new, you're going is he always like this? He's worse, usually but he's tamping it down for you because it's Thanksgiving and he likes you.

I want to look at Psalm 100, just five verses here. Notice what it says.

"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."

Now, here's what I'd like to do, if we could. I want to actually pause for a second in one of these verses, because this is a Psalm for giving grateful

praise, or a Psalm of thanksgiving. And I want us to look at the part - even after the first three verses, I want us to look at verse number four and notice some very specific language there. Notice what it says in the first part of verse four. "Enter his GATES with thanksgiving and enter his COURTS with praise." Now there's no accident that the psalmist is writing about gates and courts here, because whenever he's writing about these pictures, he's trying to pull a picture into our mind. So what would the psalmist be trying to get us to think of when he's talking about the idea of gates and courts? He's trying to get us to think of the temple complex. That's the idea. So this Psalm is probably written after David at some point when the temple was constructed and he's trying to get us to think about the temple.

If you've ever been to Jerusalem - I've been there a bundle of times, you can still see in Old Jerusalem the gates that are around the city. And in some places, you can walk through some of those gates and they lead you into the temple complex where you come into the courts outside of the temple.

And so the Scripture tells us that we are to enter His gates - in other words, coming into this idea of the place of the temple where God resides, we are to enter His presence with Thanksgiving in our hearts and we are to enter His courts as we get even closer, with praise.

Now that's a very specific idea that we are told about. And the reason that the psalmist is helping us understand pictures of the temple is because the temple was a great statement to all the world that the God of everywhere,

not just of Israel, but the God of everywhere is one God and He dwells in this place. There are not many gods. There is only one God, and He is the covenant God of Israel who is revealing Himself to all of the world. What the temple was, was basically a refutation of idols or idolatry in the world. The temple demonstrated that the manifest presence of the one true God dwells here and there is no God but Yahweh. It was actually a statement against idolatry.

Now why is that important for us as we're looking at this Psalm? Because the psalmist says that we are to enter into this place with thanksgiving and praise. Now you don't separate those two things. They actually go together. When you are thanking God, you are actually praising God, and when you're praising God, you are many times thanking God. These two things aren't necessarily inseparable. They're not exactly the same, but they're also not distinctly different. They are kind of one and the same. Why is that important? Because the psalmist also tells us specifically where we are supposed to place our thanksgiving.

Notice again in the whole of verse number four. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks - where? TO HIM. And praise - what? HIS NAME. It's very specific here. Give thanks to Him and praise His name. Now why do I tell you that? Because what Psalm 100, verse number 4 is trying to teach us is that we are to put our praise and our thanks in the right place. And he says our thanks is to Him and our praise is to His name.

When you hear the phrase to His name, that is identifying the nature and essence and character of God. It's not just some kind of weird ethereal idea of a name that's placed over here. It's actually encompassing of all that God is and all that God does. When we talk about His great name, we are talking about the character and nature of who God is.

And here's what the psalmist says: Give thanks to God for God. Give your praise to God for God. In other words, he's saying before you start giving your thanks and your praise for all that God has done or all that God has given, begin with thanking God for Himself. Thank God for God. Give praise to God for God.

Why do I say this? Because he's really clear about this. In fact if you follow in the next verse after he says praise His name, give thanks to Him, here's what he says in verse number five. "For the Lord is GOOD and his LOVE endures forever; his FAITHFULNESS continues through all generations." Do you know what these are? These are demonstrations of the character of God. This is what the character of God looks like - not in total, but in the psalmist view here he says God is good, God is love, God is faithful. And as a result of God being God, bring your thanks and make sure that you place them - here you go - give your thanks to God for God. Give your praises to God for God. That's the first place that we start.

I think that the great American theologian of the 18th century, Jonathan Edwards - I think he was on to something when he said this: "True gratitude or thankfulness to God for his kindness to us, arises from a foundation laid before, of love to God for what he is in himself; whereas a

natural gratitude has no such antecedent foundation. The gracious stirrings of grateful affection to God, for kindness received, always are from a stock of love already in the heart, established in the first place on other grounds, namely God's own excellency." In other words, God is so excellent, God is so great in himself that if He never did anything, He would be worth all of our gratitude and all of our praise. That's how great God is.

And the psalmist is helping to convince us that where we need to place our thanks is to God for God. Why? Here's why - listen. Because what gratitude and thankfulness will do is keep us away from idolatry. See that's part of the reason for the temple picture that's in there. And when he says when you come into this kind of place, this presence of God at the temple, you come with thanksgiving in your heart and you come with praise. About what? Him! Not what He's done - Him!

Now it's perfectly right to thank God for what He's done. It's perfectly right to praise God for what He's done. But when we start with praising God for who God is, when we start with thanking God for who God is then everything else flows very naturally from that. You see what gratitude in our hearts to God for God does is it keeps us away from idolatry.

Now when I talk about idolatry you're going, Jerry, I don't bow down to statues or anything like that. Well, when you came into the temple obviously there weren't any statues. There weren't any graven images. That would have been a violation of both the first and the second commandment that God had given to his people, right? Those weren't in there.

Jerry, we don't really have those today. Well, you haven't traveled the world very much if you don't think that those don't exist today, because I've been in a lot of places in the world where those do exist. But in America, generally speaking I understand. You're right. But when we talk about idols we're talking about those things that actually take the place of God. They become ultimate instead of God being ultimate.

Now here's the thing. Idolatry is really just misplaced gratitude. I want you to stay with me here for just a second. Put your big boy and big girl hats on. Idolatry's just misplaced gratitude. Follow me. So whatever it is that as dependent creatures - whatever there is inside of us, we are a people who are a dependent people. We're made as dependent beings. And that means we always feel like we need to thank or be grateful to something or someone because we are dependent beings.

Now a lot of the time what human beings have a tendency to do is thank themselves for whatever they accomplish - for whatever success or whatever victory or whatever experience they thank themselves. Or, they thank their money, or they thank their power, or they thank other relationships with other people. That's what they thank for what they've been able to do.

But here's the thing. Whatever it is - listen to this - whatever it is that we keep giving constant and ultimate thanks, soon gets our constant and ultimate worship. This is why gratitude rightly placed - thanking God for being God - keeps us away from idolatry. Because then we have our thanks in the right place as dependent creatures. And we don't have a tendency to

put other things in place of God. Because what we keep on thanking we will end up worshipping. Where our thanks keeps going is where we end up worshipping. That's why gratitude rightly placed - that we give thanks to God for God, that we give our praises to God for God - keeps us away from an idea of idolatry, putting other things in God's place.

Now, how do we apply this kind of idea? Well, let me tell you this. Here's something you can do. In fact, it's something that people have already begun doing. I would encourage you, because social media's kind of the platform that people live on these days, not everybody, but some - whatever platform you're on - Facebook or Instagram, or Twitter, or whatever you're on, right? There's so many of them, like then people start using things I've never heard of. Yeah, it's a ZappaZuppa. Snapchat...I just go I don't know what you're talking about, but whatever. So whatever platform you're on, what if you just did this? What if you just put this statement on your feed. Not The Chapel's feed - your feed that goes to all of your friends (whatever that means, right?) - all of your friends. What if you just put this statement on there: I am thankful that God is {blank}. Fill it in. Fill it in. Now maybe you're going to say something that the psalmist said. I'm thankful that God is good. I'm thankful that God is love. I'm thankful that God is faithful. I'm thankful that God is sovereign. Whatever it might be. What if you just put that on there and use the hashtag - those of you who know how to use them. If you don't, they're dangerous - stay away. If you know how to use a hashtag, just hashtag it with a just PowerOfThanks, right? That's your hashtag.

What if we just filled up all of our feeds with these statements? I am thankful that God is {blank}. Now, I'm not talking about filling it in in a way that shows your idolatry. I am thankful that God loves me more than most anybody else... Don't put that. It's not what you should put. Put something that God has revealed about Himself in the Word that is a part of his nature and a part of his character and put it on your feed. And do that today. Do it sometime today - before you leave the building maybe, or when you get home. On your feed - not on The Chapel's feed. Put it on your feed.

I think that that actually might be more helpful to all of your friends than your selfie. Possibly. I'm just saying. I'm not...Maybe I'm wrong about that. Maybe that would be more helpful but I don't think it is. Because I've seen those and they're not helpful. I'm just encouraging you to do something. And tomorrow, same statement, but fill in with a different characteristic of the nature of God. And then the next day - do it for a week. I am thankful that God is whatever. From the Scripture.

What if we just as a body at The Chapel, filled up social media with that statement? You don't even have to explain it. Just say it. This is the nature of the character of God. What are we doing? We are expressing thanks to God for God. Because He is enough. It's not just about what He's done for us, even though that's proper. It's about starting by thanking Him for who He is in Himself, in His own excellency.

You see, the power of thanks is not just in the Old Testament. The power of thanks can be demonstrated even in the New Testament, particularly as it relates to keeping us from idolatry. In the New Testament there's a

number of writers that touched on the idea of idolatry but not many did it much. Like Peter and John, just one or two times did they touch on the idea of idolatry. John a couple times, Peter once that I know of.

But Paul? Wow. Paul wrote a lot about idolatry. There's at least eighteen different places in the Scripture where Paul was talking about the idea of idolatry. Putting other things in the place of God. So you would think that if Paul wrote a lot about idolatry, that Paul would also write a lot about thankfulness or gratitude if in fact gratitude and thankfulness keeps us from idolatry. Well he did. For every one time he wrote about idolatry, he wrote two times about gratitude and thankfulness. There's over 35 occasions where Paul was writing about that.

In fact, let me give you a couple of illustrations of that - one in Colossians chapter 3 it says: "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 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. 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."

And then listen to what Paul said in 1 Thessalonians, we saw it in the bumper video. "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

I've been asked this question I don't know how many times in the course of my ministry. Jerry, I don't know what God's will is. Well, let me start here.

Rejoice always. Pray continually. In everything give thanks. For this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus. Start there.

Do you know why I think Paul is telling us that it is the will of God that you be thankful in every circumstance? Because in part, it will keep you from idolatry. It will keep you from making other gods in your life that are not God. That's what it will keep you from when you are thanking God for God, every circumstance regardless of what befalls us. Because when we do that, we find ourselves trusting in the right source and not putting our hope and our faith in other places where it doesn't belong and thus creating idols. Paul was really clear on this.

But you know who else was clear on it? Jesus. You know the story, right? Jesus feeding of the 5,000? Notice how that goes in John chapter six. When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. Can you just see Jesus going... Philip, what are we going to do about all these people? They're super hungry. I know what I'm going to do!

Philip answered him, "It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother spoke up, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there plus women and children). Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to

those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. So what did he do with the fish? He lifted it up and He gave thanks just like He did with the bread. And then you know the story, right? Everybody had as much as they want and they had leftovers. Like a massive Thanksgiving meal, right? Everyone had as much as they want and there were basketfuls of leftovers.

Do you know when you read the corollary account of this in Matthew, you notice that Matthew tells us that Jesus raised His face toward heaven. I like that part. Because what He does is He signals to everybody who's seated and who now have a view of Him as He stands above them all - He raises His head toward heaven and He gives thanks. He's taking their - listen to this - He's taking their eyes off the stuff and putting their eyes on the source. He's taking their eyes off the provision and putting their eyes on the provider. He's taking their eyes off the impossible, and putting their eyes onto the God of all things possible. You see, Jesus was helping all of these people to not create an idol for themselves, but instead was pointing their attention to give thanks to God for being God. To praise God for being God. And watching what God does. Thanks, ladies and gentlemen, is powerful.

By the way, if you didn't think that thanks is a fundamental part of the power of this story, then you missed it. Because a little bit later on after this story is told, then there's the account of the story of Jesus walking on the water and then after that, John actually talks about where Jesus boat ended up, and notice how he describes the scene in John chapter 6 verse 23: Then some boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the people

had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. Do you know that John could have described that place any way that he wanted to describe it? And here's how he described it: it's the place where the Lord gave thanks. That's the place. Because why? Thanks was part of the fundamental power of what Jesus did in that moment.

And do you know that His thanks - Jesus thanks - carried Him all the way to the cross? How do I know? Well, because when Jesus had a final Passover meal with His disciples that we read about in Mark chapter 14, notice what it says: While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it. "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them. "Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

Listen to this: Jesus took bread that He knew was representing Him. His broken body. And do you know what He did? He thanked God for it. Jesus took a cup that He knew represented that He was going to pour out His own blood for the forgiveness of sins, and do you know what Jesus did? He thanked God for it. Do you know what this is? This is Jesus doing the will of God. Giving thanks in every circumstance. He is facing His own crucifixion and He is modeling that with what He does with the bread and with the wine and do you know what He does? He thanks God.

Thanks, ladies and gentlemen, is extraordinarily powerful when we understand it. And that I believe is what the psalmist was trying to get at, because thanks rightly placed keeps us from idolatry and trusting in the wrong sources. And it reorients our worship to the God of all things possible and what He is and it also helps us to know His character, like the psalmist said. That He is good. That He is love. That He is faithful. See, this is what thanks enables us to do.

So what I want to do is I want to take a moment or two on every campus to take opportunity to thank Him in our worship and then following that, I want to share with you something special we're going to be doing around communion. So why don't everybody everywhere on all of our campuses, let's stand together and take a few moments to worship.

[Worship band sings "Jesus Paid It All" and "Doxology / Amen"]

Amen. How about we thank God?