

KEEPING A THANKFUL HEART

2007 Mark Beard

Text: I Thessalonians 5:18

One Thanksgiving season a family was seated around their table, looking at the annual holiday bird. From the oldest to the youngest, they were to express their praise. When they came to the 5-year-old in the family, he began by looking at the turkey and expressing his thanks to the turkey, saying although he had not tasted it he knew it would be good. After that rather novel expression of thanksgiving, he began with a more predictable line of credits, thanking his mother for cooking the turkey and his father for buying the turkey. But then he went beyond that. He joined together a whole hidden multitude of benefactors, linking them with cause and effect.

He said, "I thank you for the checker at the grocery store who checked out the turkey. I thank you for the grocery store people who put it on the shelf. I thank you for the farmer who made it fat. I thank you for the man who made the feed. I thank you for those who brought the turkey to the store."

Using his Columbo-like little mind, he traced the turkey all the way from its origin to his plate. And then at the end he solemnly said "Did I leave anybody out?"

His 2-year-old brother, embarrassed by all those proceedings, said, "God."

Solemnly and without being flustered at all, the 5-year-old said, "I was about to get to him."

Well, isn't that the question about which we ought to think at Thanksgiving time? Are we really going to get to him this Thanksgiving?

-- Joel Gregory, "The Unlikely Thanker," Preaching Today, Tape No. 110.

Thankful people are the happiest people in the world. These people consistently practice gratitude towards God and others. The attitude of thanksgiving is practiced daily, not just one day each year.

I. HOW CAN WE KEEP A THANKFUL HEART?

A. We stay thankful through the habit of daily thanksgiving

■ Psalms 103:1-5 says, "Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, Who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's." (NKJ)

B. We stay thankful through worshipping the Lord

C. We stay thankful by expressing gratitude to others

D. We stay thankful by refusing to grumble and complain

■ John Henry Jowett, a British preacher of an earlier generation, said this about gratitude: "Gratitude is a vaccine, an antitoxin, and an antiseptic." What did he mean? He meant that gratitude, like a vaccine, can prevent the invasion of a disgruntled, discouraged spirit. Like an antitoxin, gratitude can prevent the affects of the poisons of cynicism, criticalness, and grumbling. Like an antiseptic, a spirit of gratitude can soothe and heal the most troubled spirit. -- John Yates, "An Attitude of Gratitude," Preaching Today, Tape No. 110.

E. We stay thankful by accepting hardships, misfortune, and trouble in a right spirit

F. We stay thankful by remembering that everything we have is a gift

■ Someone wrote,

I do not thank thee, Lord,
That I have bread to eat while others starve;
Nor yet for work to do
While empty hands solicit heaven;
Nor for a body strong
While other bodies flatten beds of pain.
No, not for these do I give thanks;
But I am grateful, Lord,
Because my meager loaf I may divide;
For that my busy hands
May move to meet another's need;
Because my doubled strength
I may expend to steady one who faints.
Yes, for all these do I give thanks!
For heart to share, desire to bear,
And will to live,
Flamed into one by deathless Love—
Thanks be to God for this!
Unspeakable! His Gift!

-- Unknown, Leadership, Vol. 4, no. 4.

II. LET'S REMEMBER *WHY* WE SHOULD BE THANKFUL.

A. It wounds the heart of God when we are not thankful.

■ *Do you remember the story of the ten lepers in Luke 17:12-17?* It reads, "Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. And they lifted up their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" So when He saw them, He said to them, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. So Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? (NKJ)"

■ Vance Havner writes, "Our biggest problem in the church today is this vast majority of Sunday morning Christians who claim to have known the Master's cure and who return not [at other times] to thank Him by presence, prayer, testimony and support of His church. In fact, the whole Christian life is one big "Thank You," the living expression of our gratitude to God for His goodness. But we take Him for granted and what we take for granted we never take seriously."

-- Vance Havner in *The Vance Havner Quote Book*. Christianity Today, Vol. 31, no. 17.

B. It wounds the heart of parents when children are not thankful.

C. It wounds our own hearts when we are not thankful.

III. LET'S NOT FORGET THE NEED TO SAY, "THANK YOU."

■ Gratitude is from the same root word as "grace," which signifies the free and boundless mercy of God. Thanksgiving is from the same root word as "think," so that to think is to thank.

-- Willis P. King in *Pulpit Preaching*. Christianity Today, Vol. 34, no. 17.

A. Speaking thankful words are good for the speaker as well as the hearer.

B. Speaking thankful words reinforce a thankful mindset.

CONCLUSION

■ Someone writing in Christianity Today several years ago said, "Shall I thank God at this Thanksgiving? Why was I born at this particular time in the history of the world? Why was I born in a spotless delivery room in an American hospital instead of a steaming shelter in the dank jungle of the Amazon or a mud hut in Africa? Why did I have the privilege of going to school with capable instructors while millions around the world, without a school book, sit or squat on a dirt floor listening to a missionary?"

"How does it happen that my children are tucked into warm beds at night with clean white sheets while millions of babies in the world will lie in cold rooms, many in their own filth and vomit? Why can I sit down to a warm meal whenever I want to and eat too much when millions will know all of their lives the gnawing pangs of hunger? Do I deserve to share in such wealth? Why me and not other millions? Why was I born in a land I didn't build, in a prosperity that I didn't create and enjoy a freedom that I didn't establish? Why an American sitting comfortably in my own living room this Thanksgiving rather than an Indian squatting in the dark corner of some infested alley in Calcutta, shivering in the cold, or a Cambodian in the rubble of what used to be my home, or a terrified, running Nicaraguan in the jungle? Do I deserve it? By what right do I have it?"

-- Joel Gregory, "The Unlikely Thanker," Preaching Today, Tape No. 110.