

Travelling Light: gratitude

Reconnect – January 31, 2010

Text: Ephesians 5:1-4; Colossians 3:17

Key Thought: The life God wants us to enjoy with Him is grateful: recognizing the good and thanking God and others for bringing it to us.

Follow God's example in everything you do, because you are his dear children. Live a life filled with love for others, following the example of Christ, who loved you and gave himself as a sacrifice to take away your sins. And God was pleased, because that sacrifice was like sweet perfume to him. Let there be no sexual immorality, impurity, or greed among you. Such sins have no place among God's people. Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes – these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God.

Pre-Intro: “I’ve Been Everywhere” (Johnny Cash)

Intro: “Mind Your Manners”

Q: Why do we teach kids to say please and thank you?

- Hopefully at some point, past getting along in civilized society, they will begin to recognize that they need things from other people – that they can't do it on their own – and that since they need things from other people, they need to treat other people well
- At least, that's part of it – the survival part
- But there's another part – something inside us that says that being grateful – showing gratitude – just feels right – and that when we actually “get it” – when we see something good that has come into our lives from someone else, and we get over ourselves enough to SAY it – that it's a beautiful thing
- Gratitude is a reminder that our life is not our own – that our lives are interconnected – that life is better with others in it
- Even when we doubt ourselves, even when we lash out at others, even when we think we'd rather be left alone – we eventually find our way back
- And the people that have no-one – no-one to bring good things into their lives – well, they waste away a little bit at a time

Paul and “Travelling Light”: stay connected

- We've been looking at the same section of the Bible for five weeks – we've gone through simplicity, generosity, sincerity, forgiveness, and now gratitude
- Paul takes us through all of the stuff he wants us to get rid of, and then he says what we read earlier:

Follow God's example in everything you do, because you are his dear children. Live a life filled with love for others, following the example of Christ, who loved you and gave himself as a sacrifice to take away your sins. And God was pleased, because that sacrifice was like sweet perfume to him. Let there be no sexual immorality, impurity, or greed among you. Such sins have no place among God's people. Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes – these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God.

- What's he saying? Live a connected life – connected to God, connected to others – recognize it, make the most of it, enjoy it, participate in it – and get rid of whatever would want to gum it up
- But what keeps a life connected? What keeps it plugged in? It's **gratitude**

Ingratitude:

- Let's look at it a different way: let's look at ingratitude

Q: Why aren't we grateful for something?

Given to us, but we *deserved* it – we're good enough that it was just meant to come our way – better than others who don't get that sort of thing (a pride issue) – like awards, promotions

Given to us, but we *earned* it – we've put the time in, we've worked hard, we've made our own way (again, a pride thing – I don't need other people to give me things – I can do just fine on my own – until I can't...) – like money that we make, opportunities that come our way

Given to us, but we now *take it for granted* – we've forgotten what it was like to not have it – we've gotten so used to it that it just blends into the fabric of our lives – like our spouse, our children, our upbringing or the start we had in life, our health, family and friends

Not given to us – we already *owned* it – it was already ours – we were born with it, or we've forgotten what it was like NOT to have it – like our intelligence, our strength, our abilities

Unwanted or unneeded – we don't like it – we don't value it enough to be thankful for it – it's just something that we're going to toss aside as soon as we can – like some of the people in our lives, the difficult times we go through, the things that eventually might make us stronger, but in the right now, we wish they were gone

- Ingratitude is a pretty hollow place to be – we've all met someone we figured was ungrateful – either due to their maturity level, or their attitude, or their upbringing, or something else about them – and that sort of person isn't someone you want to be around
- Why be around a selfish person? Or an egotistical one? Their disconnectedness makes it much easier to disconnect from them and find others who will be easier to relate to

Q: Why is it hard sometimes to be grateful?

- We don't want to be weak, we don't want to rely on other people, we want to disconnect, just to be to ourselves, we've given too much away, we don't want to be in someone else's debt or allow them a foothold in our life or a chance to have a hold over us – the whole, "I've saved your life and now you owe me yours" thing
- Being reminded of our weakness definitely comes to mind when it comes to gratitude and God
- If God really is who he says he is, then every good thing ultimately comes from him – but sometimes, to look at our lives, you'd never know it
- And many times, we go on about our business and don't make the connections – that He has given us these good things, these good people, or good circumstances in our lives
- And if we don't "get" that – if we don't make that fundamental connection – then everything else is not as tightly connected as we would like

- The Bible says that God gave up everything for us – His son Jesus, giving his life for ours – that God has worked ever since the beginning of time, in spite of all the ways we have rejected him or tried to cut ourselves off from him, so that we could be reconnected to him
- And if we allow ourselves to develop that relationship with Him – if we express that gratitude to Him – it opens up an incredible perspective on our lives
- Suddenly, there is wonder and love everywhere – and we can't help but continue to see God's hand in everything
- Religion is grace – ethics is gratitude – we love because He first loved us, according to I John in the Bible – we are in His debt
- Sometimes following Jesus is hard – sometimes it's easy to think about the things we don't do, or won't do, or can't do – and sometimes it feels like a very hard way to live
- But that's the way we think when we're in the process of dis-connecting, of shutting down, of turning off – we get things turned around, we mix it up
- On the other hand, think about what do we do when we have a near-death experience? Or make it through something really bad? Or see something really bad happen to someone else that we know?
- We go home and hug our kids tighter that night – because suddenly, the curtain has been pulled back and we're grateful again for what we have – our gratitude "reboots"
- It happens watching the news on Haiti, it happens when we watch our sleeping kids, it happens when we hear from an old friend or remember the past

Natural gratitude from God: saying grace like Jesus did

- Gratitude is actually natural – it's who we were made to be – it's ingratitude that's NOT normal – that's NOT called for – that's NOT right
- It's interesting that one of the things that Jesus became known for in his time on earth – one of the things that gets mentioned again and again in the stories about Him – is the seemingly unique way he says... grace
- "Grace" – giving thanks for the most basic of human necessities, and the evidence of everything we do for ourselves – "Bring home the bacon" – grace is the antidote for thinking that it's all been US
- But for so many, grace is either a ritual that we get out of the way so we can eat, or something just for the kids to say
- "God is great and God is good" – "Lord bless this food which now we take" – the graces I grew up with
- It was weird to go somewhere and not have it recited!
- But Jesus is known for thanking God for things – food, answered prayers, healings, promises, the whole nine yards – He's a thankful guy, and it's evidence of just how connected to God that He is
- If we can bow our heads and acknowledge that despite all of our efforts to look after ourselves, that ultimately there is food on our table because of God's goodness to us – that shows clearly who we believe to be in control of our lives – and if we can't, it ALSO speaks volumes

Key Thought:

The life God wants us to enjoy with Him is grateful: recognizing the good and thanking God and others for bringing it to us.

“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.” – Paul (Colossians 3:17, NIV)

How To Live With Gratitude:

- 1) **Think about what God has done for you – think back on your life – preserved your life, brought good**
- 2) **Take note of the little things that come – from Him and others**
- 3) **Be verbal about it – pray, worship, say thank you, write little notes, give gifts in return**

Conclusion: Travelling Light

- Summarize: simplicity, generosity, sincerity, forgiveness... gratitude
- The ingredients of a great life – but only possible to have them all in place with God in the centre, with Jesus bringing them into who we are – lightening our loads again and again
- What do you say to the person who has done something incredible for you, at their own cost?

[play Matt Redman song – “This Is How We Know”]

Response: Q & A