

A Breath of Gratitude

#2 in Series – *Prayer: A Breath of Fresh Air*

We come today to our second message in the series *Prayer: A Breath of Fresh Air*... For many – their prayer life has become a stagnated stench to themselves and God – if not comatose altogether... Their prayer-life is lacking the refreshing, deeply satisfying, life-giving pleasure God intends it to be!...

Praying is as natural to the Christian, as breathing is to the body... If you don't breathe – you wouldn't live!... Christian, if you don't learn to conversationally pray to God – you will be forever trapped into enduring stagnate, polluted air that is produced by your flesh, the world and the enemy of your soul – the devil...

There are times in our lives when we get into situations where we become desperate for relief. Last week we considered how the desperations we face in life should drive us to our knees, in seeking the Lord with all of our heart – where alone relief can truly be found...

Today, we will consider how, and why *gratitude* is the default to our prayer-life...

When a person has been redeemed – which is the Biblical term describing what happens when one is saved – when they are born again – when we became a child of God... When a person has been redeemed – they have been changed. There is a new life within them. They are what Paul described in –

2 Cor. 5:17 (NASB) “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”

One of the things that “has become new” – is how we look at life... God establishes a new “default attitude” within us... It is the attitude of gratitude.

You see, a Christian has within his or her nature a constant flow of appreciation for God's grace in their life... We are ever-mindful of the fact that we are redeemed!... We have been “bought with a price” – and that price

itself is something that we can't even fully comprehend... I don't think we can ever fully understand the depth of God's love for us in the giving of His Son, the Lord Jesus. You see, Jesus not only paid the price for our redemption by the giving of His life – but He paid for our redemption by His full absorption of God's holy and just wrath toward our sin! Jesus took upon Himself all the punishment we deserve for our sin... And not only that – when He redeems us – He clothes us then in His righteousness – a perfect righteousness that God looks upon when He looks upon His redeemed.

Through *righteousness* is really a complex truth – the most simple and accurate meaning of the term is that we have been *made right with God*... Getting right with God is not something we can accomplish ourselves. It is something that must be done for us – and Jesus, the Only One Who could accomplish such a feat, did just that when He died upon the cross... Consider again just what happened in those precious moments upon which history hinges...

2 Cor. 5:21 (NASB) “He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

Just what does that mean?... Christ had no sin, He was never guilty of committing any sin – but God made Him to become sin, and then poured out justice upon Him ... pour out the full wrath of God for sin upon Christ – so that in Christ, the believer, could be made right – be made righteous – with God!

When you realize what God in Christ has done for you – what will be the immediate and eternal response of your heart?... GRATITUDE!

The redeemed discover this default attitude for life – that believers have known through the generations... I think the psalmists expressed it best –

Psalms 7:17 (NASB) “I will give thanks to the LORD according to His righteousness and will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High.”

Psalms 35:18 (NASB) “I will give You thanks in the great congregation; I will praise You among a mighty throng.”

The term *thank, thanks, or thanksgiving* appears 170 times in the Scripture... And it refers to an attitude and action that actually characterizes followers of Christ... Gratitude is something believers experience and express in any and all situations in life... Gratitude is not dependent upon our circumstances...

We can't simply lift these psalms out of their context and fully appreciate what they are saying... When you read the two psalms in their entirety, you will see that they both fall into the category of psalms that are known as "*psalms of lament*" – which include expressions of a desperate heart calling out to God to intervene, and come to the rescue of the psalmist who is experiencing the attacks from the evil world and the enemies of God...

The point is – gratitude does not depend on circumstances... Gratitude – the expression of a thankful heart – is a matter of choice, not situations...

As was stated last week – I don't know what circumstances in life you may be enduring right now – but God does!... And no matter what we may be experiencing – HE is worthy of our worship and gratitude...

As we think together about the details of these two verses – we need to first consider –

1. The Personal Expression of Gratitude being offered by the worshipper...

Psalm 7:17 (NASB) "I will give thanks to the LORD ...

In order for your worship to be legitimate – you must be the one to express it!... There is no worship by proxy... The worship team doesn't sing your worship... Your spouse, children of fellow church member doesn't offer your worship. Angels don't worship in your behalf!... You and I are to express our hearts of gratitude to the Lord...

God is listening to your heart – are you expressing it to Him?...

J.I. Packer – “We need to discover all over again that worship is natural to the Christian, as it was to the godly Israelites who wrote the psalms, and that the habit of celebrating the greatness and graciousness of God yields an endless flow of thankfulness, joy, and zeal.”

That leads us to the second observation in this verse that we will call –

2. The Means of Expressing Gratitude

We express our worship – of which gratitude is a part – by means of His righteousness.

“... according to His righteousness...”

In other words, without clean hands ... without a clean heart ... without a clean mind – your expression of worship will fall on deaf ears...

Is 59:2 (NASB) “But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden *His* face from you so that He does not hear.”

You and I are not qualified to worship God in our own righteousness – for we have none...

Rom 3:10 (NASB) “as it is written, ‘THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE’”

If you say; “not me, I’m ok and will stand on my own”... Be careful –

Isa. 64:6 (NKJV) “But we are all like an unclean *thing*, and all our righteousnesses *are* like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.”

I am convinced that the reason so little gratitude is experienced and expressed in lives – is because we are filled with putrefying pride...

You may think that the opposite of gratitude is ingratitude... I think the opposite of gratitude is ... pride!

The Puritan **Henry Ward Beecher** said it best – “Pride slays thanksgiving, but an humble mind is the soil out of which thanks naturally grow. A proud man is seldom a grateful man, for he never thinks he gets as much as he deserves.”

So – if we are disqualified to even come before God to express gratitude – then how can I come?... How can you dare even approach such a Holy and Worthy God?

The answer – once again – lies in His provision for us!... Were you listening earlier when we examined this issue?... It is the truth that we should never “get over” – it is the truth upon which our entire eternity rests – it is the truth that each of us must come to –

2 Cor. 5:21 (NASB) “He (God the Father) made Him who knew no sin (God the Son) *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

And once you have trust this Substitutionary Sacrifice – as the Sovereign Lord and Savior of your life – then you are clothed in His righteousness – and then are more than welcomed into His presence to worship!

Look at the text again –

Psalm 7:17 (NASB) “I will give thanks to the LORD according to His righteousness and will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High.”

3. The Method of Expressing Gratitude

There are two primary ways we are to express our gratitude found in these focal verses we are looking to today. The first is –

➤ **An expression to God through song**

Psalm 7:17 (NASB) “... and will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High.”

The second method of expressing our gratitude – is not only an expression to God in worship – but –

➤ **An expression to God in prayer**

Look at –

Psalm 35:18 (NASB) “I will give You thanks ...”

How do we most directly express our gratitude to God?... Through PRAYER!

Andrew Murray (1828-1917), was a pastor, author and missionary – that God continues to use to teach and challenge Christians in their prayer life – “Let us thank God heartily as often as we pray that we have His Spirit in us to teach us to pray. Thanksgiving will draw our hearts out to God and keep us engaged with Him; it will take our attention from ourselves and give the Spirit room in our hearts.”

Our expression of gratitude is not only offered TO God – it is evidenced to others – in behalf of God!... Notice what we will call –

➤ **An expression about God in witness**

Psalm 35:18 (NASB) “... in the great congregation; I will praise You among a mighty throng.”

So this leads us to an application of this message... Are you grateful?... Is your prayer life characterized by gratitude?... Will you be bold to give Him thanks “... in the great congregation; I will praise You among a mighty throng.”... Well – we may not be “a mighty throng”, or what some might call a “great congregation” – but we ARE a congregation – that God calls great – because we belong to Him...

So – will you be willing to stand and express your gratitude to the Lord even now?...

Questions to consider in Community Group:

- How would you define the term *gratitude*?
- The claim was made that – “*gratitude* is the default to our prayer-life”. Is that true? Why should gratitude be a “default” in our prayer life?
- There was also the claim that – “gratitude is not dependent upon our circumstances”. Do you agree, or disagree with that statement? Please explain why.
- Which passage of Scripture shared in the message challenged, encouraged, or resonated with you the most, and why?
- What are your thoughts about the quote from Henry Ward Beecher (“*Pride slays thanksgiving, but an humble mind is the soil out of which thanks naturally grow. A proud man is seldom a grateful man, for he never thinks he gets as much as he deserves.*”)?
- According to Andrew Murray – what is a main benefit for expressing our heart of gratitude? (“*Let us thank God heartily as often as we pray that we have His Spirit in us to teach us to pray. Thanksgiving will draw our hearts out to God and keep us engaged with Him; it will take our attention from ourselves and give the Spirit room in our hearts.*”) If that is so, how does “*thanksgiving ... draw our hearts out to God and keep us engaged with Him*”?
- For what are you thankful – that perhaps you didn’t get to express “*in the great congregation*”?
- What personal applications do we need to make to our lives that stem from the truths expressed in this message?