

November 18, 2018
Gratitude - A Necessary Attitude
Deuteronomy 26:1-11
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This week people all across the country will celebrate Thanksgiving Day. Families will get together and sit down to bounteous feasts of turkey with all the trimmings, apple cider and pumpkin pie. During this Thanksgiving holiday we feast and thank God for what God has given us. This morning we celebrate Thanksgiving Sunday. This morning's scripture focuses on what God has done. We need a time to pause and to think of how blessed we are, how much we are subjects of God's grace.

Thanksgiving is an important part of our faith. Gratitude, the root of thanksgiving, is a necessary attitude. Look at this building, this sanctuary. Everything about it and everything in it, from the cross at the front to the doors at the back, is here by the grace of God. Indeed we are here by the grace of God.

In today's text Deuteronomy 26, the people of Israel are told what they should say when they bring their offerings to the temple. They are to say: *"The Lord brought us into this place, and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. So now I bring the first fruit of the ground, which you, O God, have given me"* (9-10). God has brought us into this place. God has given us the fruit of the earth in this place. God has given us our daily bread. God has brought us safely to this point in time.

This is the message of all scripture. Everything around us, everything that we are, everything that we have, is a gift from God. Indeed the scriptures go further. They remind us that the gifts from God are often given to us through others, some through the work of other folks who are known to us and some through folks who will always be unknown to us, nameless servants of God's grace.

Look at this sanctuary again, this gift from God. The decorations were placed here by particular people. They just didn't happen to show up. Their time and energy were expended, time and energy which could have been used for a shopping trip or a visit with a friend. But their time and energy were instead dedicated to the glory of God. The fact that our building is warm is due to the fact that someone out of love for God and concern for God's people set the thermostat program or came early and turned it on. The fact that our church building is clean inside and outside is due to the fact that someone came to church during the week and cleaned it.

Our Sunday school doesn't just happen. Our Sunday school classes, the praise music and the hymns we hear and sing today, the pews we sit on and the pulpit I stand behind, everything here represents a series of gifts from God to us. Gifts from God, gifts that have come to us through the

labor and the dedication of the people among us, of the people who went before you, and of the people who went before them and served God as best as they could.

Are we aware from week to week, from day to day, how much has been done for us? How much we have received through no merit of our own? While we serve God in one way, others who serve God in other ways have helped us. Are we aware of how much God has helped us? Have we thanked God enough? Have we thanked God's servants enough who worked hard for this church and several ministries? Gratitude is a necessary attitude. Without the attitude of gratitude our salvation is incomplete. If we don't have the attitude of gratitude, the health of our families, of our churches, of our nation, and of our world is in danger.

Several years ago Dr. Nick Stinnett of the University of Nebraska conducted a group of studies called the "Family Strengths Research Project." Dr. Stinnett and his researchers identified six qualities that make strong families. The first and the most important quality to be found in strong families was the quality of appreciation. Dr. Stinnett concludes that they express to each other their appreciation for what the other members do and for who they are. Praise and thanksgiving are important. I hope when you gather together as a family for the dinner on Thanksgiving Day, you may have a time to share and express your appreciation to other family members.

In fact, it is very easy to get discouraged and to get down in life. You might be living in chronic pain. You might be suffering from a decline in the standard of living. You may simply not feel appreciated or valued by others. Any of a hundred things could be assailing us and making us feel miserable, even making us question God. I think this feeling is normal enough. But it is important that we go beyond our pain, suffering, discouragement or even the questions about God and go back to our faith. Thanksgiving is an important matter to us, as it leads and guides us to turn to God and remember all that God has done. It is important to keep in mind our blessings given by God and to thank God. Our thanksgiving and appreciation depends on what God has done for us and what God continues doing for us. Let us think of the blessings it brings to us, and the blessings it brings to others.

Look around you. Look around your family, friends, neighbors, this church, and others. Find something that is good and thank God for it. Find somebody who is caring and thank God and the person who is doing it. Look around, look inside, and look outside.

Express your praise for God's blessings. Even though you and your family have experienced tough times or bad and ugly things, you may think of how God has been faithful to you and your family and how God continued to protect you and guide you and your family. God is hidden in the ordinary routine events of our lives. Our practice of giving thanks will bring God to our sight. We begin to give thanks when we open our lives up to God and give God first place.