



Giving Thanks in Hardship

Message Notes, November 26, 2017

2 Thessalonians 5:16-18

In this miniseries on Thanksgiving, we have examined giving thanks in the ordinary and giving thanks when there is lack; today we explore giving thanks in hardship.

We, in America (by and large) don't know the intensity of hardship like many who live in Third World circumstances, but we don't need to simply dismiss our personal difficulties because of this global disparity. Your pain is real to you.

There are scriptures throughout the Bible (esp. the New Testament) that call us to rejoice or give thanks in the midst of hardship. Read these: Ephesians 5:18-20, James 1:2, Philippians 4:4-7.

The Lord's posture is not like a tough coach who says, "Suck it up, put some dirt on it, and get back out there!" He understands that "we are but dust" (Psalm 103) – weak, frail and easily troubled. His call to thanksgiving is not harsh. Thanksgiving works for us; it becomes for us a means of grace.

In every hardship, two voices are vying for our mind and heart: The narrative of Satan and the narrative of God.

- Satan: "See, God doesn't care about you. He's abandoned you. You are on your own."
- God: "I see you; I am with you; if you will trust me, I will work in you and in this hardship, for good."

How does Romans 8 capture this narrative of God in verses 28, 31-32 and 35-39?

The story of Joseph, who experienced long and intense hardship (betrayal, sold into slavery, falsely accused, imprisoned, and for many years, forgotten), reveals one who chose to trust in the narrative of God in the face of hardship.

Thanksgiving shakes us free from our selfish, prideful orientation that says we don't deserve difficulty. It's not fair!

- The truth is we don't deserve anything. All of life is a gift. Apart from Christ, we deserve nothing.
- In Christ, by grace, God has given us everything we need "for life and godliness."
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In summary, thanksgiving is rooted in a posture of humility, and in thanksgiving, we trust God implicitly.

We love to quote Jeremiah 29:11 ("For I know the plans I have for you ... to give you a hope and a future ..."), but we need to recognize the context in which these words were spoken through the prophet. The people of Israel were in the middle of a 70-year exile in Babylon. They are called to trust God in the midst of (long) hardship.

Through thanksgiving, we trust that God will bring "beauty from ashes." We trust the Romans 8 verses above.



How do these verses embody this “implicit trust” in God: 1 Peter 1:6-7, James 1:2-4

* Anne Voskamp (“1000 Gifts”) writes that pain and hardship can open up “tears” or “thin places” in our lives that allow us to see God more clearly and experience His presence more deeply. This leads to the idea that thanksgiving is a means of grace.

Giving thanks, esp in the midst of hardship, helps us see God and know His loving presence with us. Such seeing transforms how we see the hardship and empowers us for walking through it (with Him).

Jesus himself models thanksgiving in hardship. He took the bread and cup that represent His broken body and shed blood, and “He gave thanks.” (Luke 22:14-19). On this eve of His betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion, he looks to His Father and gives thanks.