**28th September 2014**

**Deuteronomy 8.6-18; 1 Thessalonians 5.12-24**

I shall use a full script for this talk – I don’t want to miss anything out – I don’t want to leave you in deficit. (Poor Ed Milliband)

Today is our Harvest Thanksgiving. Thankyou is a powerful and important word. Being thankful is n important and powerful attitude. When the ancient Israelites brought in the harvest they were to give thanks to God, to remember God, the provider of all good gifts. Paul writes in I Thes. 5:16-18 says, "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus."  
  
Will Mansell the co-ordinator for the Stroud District Foodbank was telling a story at the Churches Together forum the other week of how recently they had the sad case of man who had been looking after his disabled wife, but the strain of that had led him to have a break down and ultimately the loss of his job. This was compounded by the bedroom tax which deprived them of income that they had become dependent on. Suddenly they had run out of money. He was in tears asking for help from the foodbank; the shame was virtually unbearable for him. But our volunteers at the Foodbank gave him such a welcome and gave him the hospitality to share his story and to know the support of people in his community that he has been able to start to get back on his feet. The other week he returned to the foodbank. He had found employment and had gone out and spent a £100 on food which he had brought along to donate to the foodbank. He was so thankful for the help he had received.

Hospitality and welcome can often start a cascade of grace. Our churches are uniquely placed in our communities to offer a place of hospitality for all, from which grace can flow. When we practice hospitality and welcome we can foster that attitude of thankfulness.

Paul writes: Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances. Notice the important words in this passage; ALWAYS, CONTINUALLY, and IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES. He is talking about a continual attitude for Christians - an attitude of the heart. How we are to be to each other.

But how, you may wonder, can we have this attitude continually, especially "in all circumstances?" Can you be thankful in all circumstances? I believe the answer lies in our perspective of thanksgiving. We need the proper perspective.  
One young lady wrote home from college,  
  
"Dear Mom: Sorry I haven’t written sooner. My arm really has been broken. I broke it, and my left leg, when I jumped from the second floor of my dormitory...when we had the fire. We were lucky. A young service station attendant saw the blaze and called the Fire Department. They were there in minutes. I was in the hospital for a few days. Paul, the service station attendant, came to see me every day. And because it was taking so long to get our dormitory liveable again, I moved in with him. He has been so nice. I must admit that I am pregnant. Paul and I plan to get married just as soon as he can get a divorce. I hope things are fine at home. I’m doing fine, and will write more when I get the chance. Love,  
Your daughter, Susie  
  
P.S. None of the above is true. But I did get a "D" in Sociology and failed Chemistry. I just wanted you to receive this news in its "Proper Perspective!"

In all circumstances, we need a proper perspective of our circumstances and of our God. Only then we will be able to give thanks to the Lord always. Your perspective will depend on your belief, your faith. Do you have a wide perspective on life – or a very narrow perspective?

The attacks on Christians in Iraq by Islamic State are truly horrifying. I cannot imagine how I would respond if I was given an ultimatum: convert, leave or die. The pictures of the dead bodies of Christians and others who refuse to give in to their demands are completely humbling. They stood firm to their beliefs. We are looking at the nature of our Christian belief in our house groups this autumn and spring. it is not an academic exercise – it is vital we know what we believe and in what we hope. That will give us a biblical and godly perspective on life. Especially when we are in trouble and times are difficult. The Israelites were urged to remember God when the Harvest came in. when all was comfortable and they had all they needed the temptation was to forget God, to think that faith and thankfulness was not important. The writer of Deuteronomy urges them not to forget God who ultimately provided you with the wealth and the gifts. Otherwise you may become proud, hard hearted.   
  
I suggest that there may be at least three attitudes that steal away our gratitude. Three things that keep us from being thankful.  
  
1) One is our pride. This is the attitude that says, "Nobody ever gave me anything, I worked hard for everything I have." For years you studied hard and now it is finally paying off. With this kind of attitude, we feel that we have no one to thank but ourselves.  
  
  
2) Another attitude that keeps us from being thankful is a critical spirit or constant complaining. Instead of being grateful, this person will always find something to complain about.   
  
"A lady known as an incurable grumbler constantly complained about everything. At last her preacher thought he had found something about which she would be happy, for her farm crop was the finest for miles around. When he met her, he said with a beaming smile, `You must be very happy Mary. Everyone is saying how healthy your potatoes look this year.’ `True they’re pretty good’ she replied. ‘But what am I going to do when I need bad ones to feed the pigs.’"  
  
  
3) A third attitude that keeps us from being grateful is carelessness. Someone once said that if the stars only came out once a year, we would stay out all night to watch them. But   
they are there every night and we have grown a costumed to them.   
  
The Israelites grumbled because they had no food so God miraculously sent manna crust-like bread) to cover the ground each day except the Sabbath day. Then they started to grumble because it was the same thing every day.   
  
They had a miracle - straight from God every day but were no longer satisfied. Because of pride, carelessness or a critical spirit we will never be truly thankful for all that God has given us.  
  
  
Rudyard Kipling was a great writer and poet whose writings we have all enjoyed. Unlike many old writers, Kipling was one of the few who had opportunity to enjoy his success while he lived. He also made a great deal of money at his trade.   
  
One time a newspaper reporter came up to him and said, "Mr. Kipling, I just read that somebody calculated that the money you make from your writings amounts to over a hundred dollars a word; Mr. Kipling raised his eyebrows and said, "Really, I certainly wasn’t aware of that."   
  
The reporter cynically reached down into his pocket and pulled out a one hundred dollar bill and gave it to Kipling and said, "Here’s a hundred dollar bill, Mr. Kipling. Now, you give me one of your hundred dollar words." Mr. Kipling looked at that hundred dollar bill for a moment, took it and folded it up and put it in his pocket and said, "Thanks."  
  
He’s right! The word thanks is certainly a hundred dollar word. In fact, I would say it is more like a million dollar word. It’s one word that is too seldom heard and too rarely spoken and too often forgotten. If we would all adopt an attitude of thanksgiving into our lives - our lives would be changed. We would savour each day.  
  
If any nation ought to be thankful to God and grateful for his goodness, it ought to be us. I know we get animated over the question of immigration – but that’s because we live in a great country that other people are desperate to come to.

This morning I would like to share with you three things we learn about thanksgiving from the Bible.[[1]](#endnote-1)  
  
  
THANKSGIVING SHOULD BE EXPRESSED  
  
Ps.100 which says, "Enter his gates with thanksgiving in your heart." David says in Ps. 107  
"Give thanks to the Lord for he is good." We should express our thanks to God and others.   
  
In Luke 17 we read about ten men who were healed by Jesus of their leprosy. Out of those ten men only one came back to give thanks and Jesus said, "Where are the other nine?" He was the only one willing to take time to go back and say "thank you." Because of that Jesus said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."  
  
Have you ever wondered why Jesus said that? I mean like the others, the man was already healed of his leprosy from the time they went to show themselves to the priest. But when Jesus says to this one man, "Your faith has made you well," he wasn’t just talking about a physical healing; he was talking about a spiritual one, a mental one. He was made whole.  
  
We too are made whole by our thanksgiving. Psychologists today tell us that sincere gratitude, thanksgiving, is the healthiest of all human emotions. Hans Selye, who is considered the father of stress studies, has said that gratitude produces more positive emotional energy than any other attitude in life.  
  
And a thankful heart will endear others to us and us to others.  
For you see thanksgiving is not only good for the giver but also good for the receiver.  
  
God appreciates our thanksgiving. It lifts Him up and it glorifies Him. And thanksgiving endears him to us. It draws us closer. If we are not grateful, if we do not express our thanksgiving, then it can have the opposite effect. In Rom. 1:21 Paul says, "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened."   
  
This passage seems to imply that people who are ungrateful to God will soon fall away - their hearts will become hardened. Here, we see pride keeping people from worshipping God and being thankful.  
  
This is our belief and the importance of belief again – we believe – that god is for us not against us. We believe God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. We believe that Jesus died for us and rose again. We believe that death is not the end. Belief changes things. Belief is cause for thankfulness and we express it in worship week by week.

We express it in our giving too.

When we realize how much God has done for us and how much he continues to do, we should be more than happy to give something back to him. This comes through our time and also our financial giving. Someone has said that for thanksgiving to be real Thanksgiving there must be "Thanks" and there must be "Giving."  
  
In the last year, our church has been truly blessed by God. We have seen people come forward and find faith in Christ, we have seen families place their membership here, and our giving has gone up slightly, we do amazing things for not a lot of money. We are good value. We hope we are a blessing to many people – but of course we can only do that through what people can give – in their time, their prayer, their money.

It’s always a difficult call to make as leaders of the church. What can we do? – are we over stretching ourselves, are we under resourced, or is there more.

Now I’m greedy – greedy for the kingdom of God. I always want us to make more of an impact. But as our congregation grows so will our needs. If God has blessed you - bless his work by giving in whatever way you can. James 1:17 says, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the father of lights."   
  
When we go to a restaurant, we are more than happy to give a good waitress a 10% tip, but for some reason, many have a problem with giving God 10% of all the good gifts he has given us. Can I encourage you to have thankful hearts.  
  
  
OUR THANKSGIVING SHOULD BE EXPANSIVE

And as our thanksgiving expands, it should the blessings and the burdens of life;   
  
1) The Blessings of Life.   
  
You know, I really love my wife. She is a very special lady. She’s truly a blessing to my life. One thing that is really special is that each evening she stands in our kitchen and thanks God for our sink full of dirty dishes.   
  
No, she doesn’t do that! Who does? But we should. A sink full of dirty dishes usually means that we have been blessed by God with daily food & water.  
  
Do you realize that two thirds of the world goes to bed hungry every night?   
  
Our prayers are often very general. We say, "Thank you God for all your blessings" but what blessings are we really thankful for? Count your blessings...name them one by one...count your blessings see what God has done.  
  
  
Be thankful in the blessings of life. Be thankful in the burdens of life

2) The Burdens of Life.   
  
This is a tough one. I Thes. 5:18 says, "Give thanks in ALL circumstances’. You may think, surely Paul made a mistake or even that this was easy for him to say. But it wasn’t. Paul suffered from some very difficult problem that he called a thorn in the flesh. He also had been run out of town, beaten, whipped, imprisoned, betrayed by friends, naked, cold, hungry shipwrecked, and stoned because of his faith. Yet, Paul never stopped giving thanks.   
  
Paul said several things that really show he had the proper perspective of the burdens of life...  
  
"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us..." Rm 8:18  
  
"That is why for Christ’s sake, I delight in weakness, in insults, in hardships, in persecution, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong..." 2 Cor 12:10  
  
When we like Paul have the proper perspective we to can give thanks in all circumstances...  
  
In our weakness God can make us strong. When we are struggling God is able to work in our lives. He helps us through times that we could have never faced on our own.  
  
I don’t think you should be thankful for difficult circumstances but attempt to be thankful in those difficult times.   
  
You see, I don’t believe Paul is saying that we have to be thankful for our problems but rather - IN THEM." And being thankful in them allows God to use them for His greater good.

Henry Frost served for many years as a missionary to China. In his journal he wrote of a very difficult time in his life. He says,  
"I had received sad news from home, and deep shadows had covered my soul. I prayed BUT the darkness did not vanish. I summoned myself to endure, BUT the darkness only deepened. Then I went to an inland station and saw on the wall of the mission home these words: ’TRY THANKSGIVING.’ I did, and in a moment every shadow was gone, not to return.  
  
Have you been going through some difficult times?   
  
Have you prayed but they’re still there?   
  
Have you told yourself to keep on going and it would someday disappear - but it got deeper?   
  
Then why not try THANKSGIVING?

Finally our THANKSGIVING SHOULD BE EXPECTED

Paul says we are to "give thanks in all circumstances BECAUSE this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus." This is God’s will for us. And he knows, if we will do it, that our lives will be changed.  
  
Our thanksgiving should be expressed, expansive, and expected.

Give thanks in all circumstances.

1. Sermon taken from Steve Malone sermon on attitude of thankfulness: <http://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/a-proper-perspective-on-thanksgiving-steve-malone-sermon-on-thanksgiving-holiday-40858.asp> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)