

**Thx: The Gospel & a Grateful Life** | September 24, 2017

*Gratitude and the Gospel (Part One)*

**Introduction / Review**

- Sometimes we bump into people marked by gratitude. We catch a glimmer of what we'd like to enjoy. Sometimes we feel surrounded by discontentment, living in the shallows, or feeling drained.
- We looked at different examples in history where people expressed a similar discontentment and saw this wasn't just a postmodern problem, but also a modern and ancient problem.
- And so we looked to Jesus, particularly his teaching on money in the Sermon on the Mount, who points out what hides in plain sight – everyone serves something, everyone worships a God.

*<sup>24</sup> “No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money.*

- This turns out to be pivotal in any discussion about Christian gratitude. Who or what we worship with determine whether or not we get stuck in discontentment or thrive in gratitude.
- In order to live gratefully we must learn to not only appreciate what we've been given, but first and foremost get to know the character of the Giver. Living a grateful life is only possible once we remember there is *someone* to be grateful to.
- And it also turns out that if we all have to worship someone or something, Jesus seems to be a pretty good God to serve.

*“Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.” (Matthew 6)*

- We closed by asking: are we discontent with being discontent? If so, perhaps we should heed Jesus' words, and accept his invitation, not just a new way of living, but into life itself.

### **Is there more to Gratitude?**

- *"When I'm grateful to my clients, I actually sell more."*
- Perhaps, when we live grateful lives, we are actually functioning as intended, we're operating as designed. If God is generous, and part of our purpose (dare we say vocation) as human beings is to respond in gratitude, then maybe it's no wonder people around us react well to that kind of thing.
- What if gratitude isn't just a nicety, not just cosmic window dressing, but is necessary to how the universe is designed to work? What if gratitude is fundamental to whether or not we thrive as human beings?
- What if gratitude is not just a pleasantry, but an intrinsically human response – not just to one another but beyond also to someone else?

### **Jesus, the Giver of Life**

- If gratitude is inherently human, who are we to direct that toward? The question we're asking today is: Who is the Giver?
- Sometimes we have to begin with who the Giver is not, because we tend to have all kinds of ideas about God, from all kinds of places.
- Sometimes we get it wrong:
  - Taking the Giver for granted - a cosmic vending machine.
  - Mistaking the Giver for a Taker.
- The journey into a grateful life starts with getting God's character right, discovering who he really is as described in the Bible, and chiefly, through the person of Jesus. This is exactly what John meant right at the beginning in his stunning and mysterious biography of Jesus.

*"No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known." (John 1)*

- So, what kind of God has Jesus made known? As we have mentioned John, maybe we can start with “in the beginning”, and we might look to where he’s lifting that from. Sometimes our problem with the God story is that we start in the wrong spot. We start with sin, or that God’s angry, or a problem to be solved. But that’s not how the story starts. Genesis, the creation narrative: The beginning of the story is that God *gives*:

*“Then God said, “Look! I have given you every seed-bearing plant throughout the earth and all the fruit trees for your food” (Genesis 1)*

- So the beginning of the story isn’t that your bad and God doesn’t like you. The beginning of the story is that God calls us, along with all creation, good and he gives it to humans to curate and enjoy! That’s Genesis 1 -2.
- After that we see that things get mixed up, sin enters the picture, of course. But even from there, in Genesis 1-12, we see a pattern of grace and new grace. God’s gracious, humans rebel, God finds another way to be gracious.
- We see characters like Abraham who God gives to, or blesses, in order that Abraham himself can be a giver. Blessed to be a blessing.
- We can see this same pattern in Exodus with the Hebrew people. Even when God had liberated them from Egypt, and they were marked out to be a people by whom the world could get to know God, they rebelled, and what did he do when they built the golden calf? Did he smite them? No – he relents. He gives grace. This is how he chooses to define himself in key moments – generosity and grace.
- This continues to be the pattern in the time of the prophets and kings when people continually turned their backs on God. Here we see the great patience of God where time and again he forgives and restores.
- We can read of David and other’s experience in the Psalms, which are full of poems about not only how powerful God is and all he’s provided (Psalms 65, 104) but how intimately kind he is (Psalms 40, 63).
- Of course, all of God’s work, all of human history according the Bible, comes to a magnificent crescendo in the person of Jesus, in whom God’s generosity is most clearly and abundantly demonstrated.

- Jesus comes to give us the Good News— he’s the flesh and blood proof that God is not just *loving*, but that love itself originates with him and emanates from him and his cross – an image graven so deeply into history it can’t be ignored.
- The image of a crucified Jesus is the enduring depiction of God’s benevolence. An image that says God is so much a giver that he gives us his very life. *“No one takes my life from me, I give it of my own free will...” (John 10)*
- And following Jesus, in Acts we see his giving of the Holy Spirit, poured out on all people.
- Then in Acts we see the Church given to the world. And that’s the ongoing story where you and I daily grow in our understanding that we’re not only given to by God, but that God has given us to the world. Blessed, to be a blessing.
- It’s no wonder why New Testament Writers like Paul hardly utter a prayer without gratitude beginning and ending each. James might sum it all up best when he writes,  
*“Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights...” (James 1)*
- Emily Bronte, *Last Lines*

*With wide-embracing love  
Thy Spirit animates eternal years,  
Pervades and broods above,  
Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates, and rears.*

*Though earth and man were gone,  
And suns and universes ceased to be,  
And Thou were left alone,  
Every existence would exist in Thee.*

### **Jesus, the Giver of a Grateful Life**

- So when we read the Bible we are shaped by a story that depicts a Giver not a taker. A humble servant, not a selfish boss. That’s where Christian gratitude begins – being convinced about the true character of God. But it’s not where Christian gratitude ends!

- When that kind of character begins to grow in us, gratitude takes the form of generosity. We, as made in God's image, begin to project through our own lives the character of the one we're made in the likeness of!
- If God is the Giver, then Christians are the given!
- People experience God's true character through our generosity. We try not to just tell people that God's a giver, we aim to show them.
- So generosity is not simply an act of worship or gratitude toward God, it's a means by which people get to know who God really is.
- Our gratitude to God can be expressed through our generosity to others, and when that happens the world flourishes as it was designed to.

### **Jesus, the Guide into a Grateful Life**

- We can't be grateful and in turn generous, unless we've first received.
- Real gratitude isn't an act of sheer will. We need to have received from God. And what have we received?
- *"No one takes my life from me, I give it of my own free will..." (John 10)*
  - God gives you life.
  - God gave you his life.
- Next Steps:
  - **Get Introduced** – talk to a friend, a pastor, Alpha, Foundations, many ways in our church.
  - **Get Re-acquainted** – join any of these ways in order to do so.
  - **Get Personal** – no three-step program to get to know God's and his true character. We each must venture into friendship with him through prayer and Scripture.

### **Discussion Questions**

- Did you grow up thinking about God as more of a Giver or a Taker? Share your experience.
- Why is Jesus vital in revealing God's character?

- What have you received from God that you treasure most?