

Becoming Like Christ in Thanksgiving
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We loved worshipping in the Thailand churches we visited on our trip. We found the people to be more expressive in worship than I expected. But in the last church we visited – they were less responsive. I asked Mary about it and she said this church was larger and the people were more educated than in the smaller churches. As a result, they were more reserved.

That got me thinking and it's probably true in America, too. I don't have any statistics, but from personal observation, the more educated people are and the more they make – the less outwardly expressive they tend to be when it comes to praise and worship.

So – I want to spend a few Sundays dealing with this. As I prayed about it, I felt led to preach on The Praise Life of Jesus Christ. This is something I preached on about ten years ago, but I felt we could use a refresher course!

Since this is Thanksgiving week, I'm preaching today on Becoming Like Christ in Thanksgiving. I want to begin by reminding you that:

1- Everybody worships!

We were created to worship, so everybody worships something. Satan doesn't care what you worship, as long as it's not God.

Thailand is about 95% Buddhist and everywhere you go there are Buddhist temples. Many people there are animists, which means they believe that everything in nature – plants, animals, mountains, rivers and trees - have souls. And they worship and give offerings to these things. Everywhere we went we saw food and drinks set next to trees. I asked about it and was told they were there as an offering to the trees. I said, "Doesn't anyone see that the trees are not eating or drinking?"

Satan understands the purpose and power of praise and worship better than we do! That's why he will do anything to distract us or keep us from worshipping God. Satan wants worship and he'll do anything to get that worship. He even tried that with Jesus.

After Jesus was baptized, he went in to the desert and was tempted by the devil. The third temptation was about worship. Matthew 4:8-10 says:
Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.'"

This passage shows us that Satan will give up everything else in order to receive worship. But Jesus shows us how to overcome Satan with the word. He is our example in spiritual warfare.

2- Jesus is our example in praise and worship.

There are many verses that teach us to follow Christ as our example. In 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul said: *Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.*

Jesus Christ is our example of how to live and how to give.

Jesus Christ is our example of how to pray and how to obey.

Jesus Christ is our example of how to serve and how to love.

Jesus Christ is also our example of how to worship.

If the rest of our lives should be modeled after Jesus, so should our worship.

God tells us how He wants to be worshipped in His Word. Every time the Bible gives us a glimpse of heaven, we see worship. But – even more importantly – we see praise and worship modeled in the life of Jesus Christ. This is important because our destiny is to become like Him. Right? Romans 8:29 says God predestined us to be conformed to the likeness of His Son. God wants us to be like Jesus, so the way we can know how to worship is to see it taught in God's word and modeled by Jesus Christ.

Many people have never been taught that Jesus expressed thanksgiving, praise and worship to His Father. So, my goal is to show you how Jesus worshipped, so that we will have a greater understanding of how we should worship.

Unfortunately, many people believe that how we worship is determined by our personality or our emotions or the traditions of our church rather than the Word. But Colossians 2:8 says:

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

We don't need to follow some tradition in worship; we need to follow Christ!

We don't need to follow some person's opinion in worship; we need to follow Christ!

We don't determine how we want to worship God; God determines how we should worship.

We don't tell God how we will worship; God tells us how He wants to be worshipped.

We don't worship based on our personality; we worship based on God's commands in His word.

We don't worship based on the examples of people, but the example of Jesus Christ!

Somehow many people have this wrong image of Jesus being this mystical, long-faced, sad holy man with a halo. I know the Bible says Jesus was a man of sorrows acquainted with grief. But did you know Jesus was happy? Hebrews 1:9 talks about Jesus and says:

God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions.

The New Living Translation says:

God has anointed You, pouring out the oil of joy on You more than on anyone else.

Could it be, contrary to popular belief, that Jesus Christ was the most joyful person who ever lived? Could it be, if we are being conformed to His image, that we should be the happiest people on earth?

After all:

We've been forgiven by the blood of Jesus.

We've been saved by the grace of God.

We've been filled with the Holy Spirit.

We've been healed and set free.

We've been blessed abundantly more than we can ask or think.

On top of it all, we've got heaven to look forward to.

We should be joyous! We have good news.

Don't tell me, "Well pastor, I've got joy in my heart, I just don't show it." There was a big Christian song in the 70's that said: If you're happy, notify your face. Some Christians look like they're miserable, but we are being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ who was full of the joy of the Lord, who expressed that joy outwardly and told us to do the same. Jesus is our example in praise and worship.

3- Jesus taught us to be thankful

Luke 17:12-19 tell us of a time when Jesus healed 10 lepers.

And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. So Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?" And He said to him, "Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well."

Jesus taught us several truths here:

- Jesus taught us that God expects all of us to be thankful.

Jesus expected all ten to be thankful. But if you look at the percentages here – only 10% were grateful. 90% were ungrateful – and that percentage probably holds true today! So many people are part of “the other nine” those who never say thanks to God. They get an answer to prayer, but never say thanks.

I don't want to be one of the other nine. I want to be grateful. It's easy to be ungrateful. It takes effort to return to Jesus to give thanks, but that's what He expects.

I don't know about you, but one of my pet peeves is ungrateful people. I do things for people with no strings attached, but it bugs me when they don't say thanks. I'm not asking for much – just show a little gratitude.

When's the last time you said thanks to your spouse – or your boss for your job – or your parents for all they do for you – or your teacher? Jesus taught us that we should be thankful people.

- Jesus taught us that thanks needs to be given

The other nine may have been thankful in their hearts, but Jesus expects people to come to Him and give Him thanks.

Yes, thanksgiving starts in the heart, but it is expressed in words and actions. Thayer's Greek Lexicon says the word used in the original Greek for thanks means “to feel grateful and to give thanks.”

A lot of people say, “I'm thankful in my heart so I don't need to express it.” WRONG! Jesus taught otherwise. Yes, God wants us to be grateful in our hearts, but He wants to hear it from our mouths! Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.

Worship is an attitude of the heart that is expressed outwardly. Jesus wants our thanks to be given. After all, the word is Thanks – Giving!

- Jesus taught us that those who are thankful receive more than those who are not!

Where do I get that? Well, the Bible says that all ten lepers were healed, but after the one came back and gave thanks, Jesus said to him – “Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well.”

I want you to notice some different words:

Verse 14 says the lepers were cleansed. The Greek word used here is *katharizo* (kath-ar-id'-zo); which means to make clean, purge, purify.

In other words, these lepers were purified and returned to the state of health.

However, when the one came back to express thanks, Jesus said in verse 19, your faith has made you well. Wait a minute – wasn't he already well? Yes, but the word used here for well is totally different from the word used earlier. This time, the word for well is *sozo*, which means to be healed, to be delivered, to be saved, to be made whole. It is more than physical healing – it is also spiritual healing – salvation.

This thankful man got some kind of healing the others did not receive. The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary says that the other nine were healed merely in body, but this one was healed in a higher spiritual sense. However you look at it, this man received something that the others didn't.

I wonder if ungratefulness is causing you to miss out on some of God's blessings? Count your blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord has done! And when you count your blessings, God will give you more blessings to count! When you give God thanks, He will give you more to be thankful for!

Jesus is our example in thanksgiving. He taught us to be thankful.

4- Jesus showed us how to be thankful

Matthew 15:32-39 tells of a time when over 4,000 gathered to hear Jesus teach. Jesus told his disciples to feed the people.

Then His disciples said to Him, "Where could we get enough bread in the wilderness to fill such a great multitude?" Jesus said to them, "How many loaves do you have?" And they said, "Seven, and a few little fish." So He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. And He took the seven loaves and the fish and gave thanks, broke them and gave them to His disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitude. So they all ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets full of the fragments that were left.

When did Jesus thank the Father? Before or after the food multiplied? Before. Is there a significance to the order? I think so. God provided after the giving of thanks.

We usually reverse this order – I'll be thankful if and when God provides. "God – give me something to be thankful for and I will be. But, how can I be thankful when my bills are overdue or my job hunt seems fruitless or something I'm believing for still hasn't happened?"

Let me ask you this- what if God is waiting for you to be thankful before He multiplies what you have?

You must be thankful for your sack lunch before you're able to feed 4,000!
You must be thankful for the job you have before you get promoted!

You must be thankful for the car you do have before you get a new one!

“But, Pastor, I don’t have a car.” Well, thank God for a bicycle.

“But Pastor, I don’t have a bike.” Well, thank God you can walk!

Look for something to be thankful for right where you are!

But Pastor, you don’t know the situation I’m in. No, I don’t. But I do know the will of God for you in the situation you’re in. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 says:

Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

The Bible does not exempt you from being thankful in tough times! The Bible teaches us that there is something to be thankful for in every situation – even in tough times.

Look at the example of Christ in Matthew 26:26-29. Jesus was partaking of the last supper with His disciples. He told them that one of them would betray Him and He would be killed.

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to His disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is My body." Then He took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom."

Now this is the Scripture we use when we take communion. For us it is a joyous remembrance of what Jesus did for us on the cross. We can be and should be grateful when we look back at that.

However, on that night – for Jesus it was very different. When He broke the bread and said, “This is my body” – He meant His physical body was about to be literally broken.

When He said, “This is my blood poured out for sin” – He meant that His blood was literally going to be spilled. His life would be taken from Him. He was one day away from death. But what did He do when He took the bread and He took the cup? HE GAVE THANKS!

- At that very moment He was being betrayed, but He gave thanks!
- He was about to face a night of absolute torture, but He gave thanks!
- He was facing death by crucifixion, but He gave thanks!
- He knew everyone He loved would desert Him, but He gave thanks!
- He knew He would face separation from His Father for the first and only time in all of eternity, but He gave thanks!

He was an example of how to be thankful in all things!

And in our great nation, we have this great holiday called Thanksgiving. It's different than others because it does not celebrate anyone's birthday or any national accomplishment. It's a day set aside to thank Almighty God for His blessings!

The three most famous Thanksgiving proclamations in American history were given by the Pilgrims, George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. They were all given during very hard times.

- Most of the Pilgrims had died during the harsh winters and less than half were still alive for the first Thanksgiving.
- Washington's Thanksgiving proclamation came right after the Revolutionary War when our country was struggling to get established.
- Lincoln's Thanksgiving Proclamation came in the middle of the Civil War!

I want you to understand that the origins of Thanksgiving came from a people who trusted in God even in the hard times. People who believed in the goodness of God. People who believed we should express our gratitude to God through thanksgiving and praise no matter what!

People with faith in God and grateful hearts. They had an understanding of the biblical key to thanksgiving found in 1 Chronicles 16:34

Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His love endures forever.

The Bible is telling us that we will never be thankful until we see that God is good and no matter how circumstances may change – God never changes!

And I'm here to testify this morning that God is good all the time!
 He was good when you were born and He'll be good the day you die.
 He was good when you got your job and He was good when you lost it.
 He was good when He told you 'yes' and He was good when He said 'no.'
 He was good when He said 'now' and He was good when He said 'wait.'

Oh give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good!
 Give thanks for all He's done for you!
 Give thanks for answered prayer!
 Give thanks that He never leaves you or forsakes you!

Thanks be to God who always gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.
 Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift of salvation by grace.
 ALWAYS give thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.
 In all things give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you!
 Can you thank God this morning!!!