

Thanking Forward
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GFC – 11-28-2021

We're in a sermon series called Forward in Thanksgiving. Today's message is today titled "Thanking Forward."

We usually think of giving thanks as something we do for past or present blessings. Today were going to see what the Bible teaches about thanking forward.

Let's begin with reading Matthew 14:14-22. In this passage Jesus was teaching a large crowd. It started getting late so the disciples asked Jesus to send the people away to get food.

Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." "We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered. "Bring them here to Me," He said. And He directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, He gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then He gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

In this passage Jesus taught a very important principle about Thanking Forward.

When did Jesus thank the Father? Was it before or after the food multiplied?
 BEFORE. Is there a significance to the order? YES!
 Jesus thanked God BEFORE the miracle occurred.
 THEN God provided. Thanksgiving preceded God's provision.

You might think that the giving of thanks was insignificant.
 But, in John's account of this he says in John 6:23

...other boats came from Tiberias, near the place where they ate bread after the Lord had given thanks.

Thanking forward is so important that the Bible specifically points out that the bread multiplied after the Lord gave thanks. It points that out because it's making a point! God provided after the giving of thanks.

We usually reverse this order- we're thankful IF and WHEN God provides.
 But thanking forward releases miracles!

However, before we can thank forward – there are two things we must do:

1- We must be thankful for what God has done in the past

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:

- First, He taught us that God expects all of us to be thankful.

Jesus expected all 10 to be thankful. But only 10% (or one) WAS grateful. 90% were ungrateful – and that percentage probably holds true today! Many of us are part of “the other nine” who never say thanks to God.

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

Actually, if you think about it – don't we all expect others to show gratitude? How do you feel if you do something for someone and they never say “thank-you?” Doesn't it make you feel un-appreciated? Or like others are ungrateful?

- Secondly 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.

I used to do this with Pastor Joe all the time. I would be thankful for something he said or did, but I wouldn't say it. I knew I was thankful so when he would feel unappreciated, I just couldn't understand it. It took me a long time to get in the habit of saying “Thank you.” I know it sounds crazy, but I guess I thought he would *just know*.

Yes, God does know when we are thankful in our hearts – but He still wants us to express that thanksgiving. Yes, thanksgiving starts in the heart, but it is expressed in words and actions. In the original Greek thanks means “to feel grateful and to give thanks.” Jesus wants our thanks to be given. After all, the word is Thanks – Giving!

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

You see the Bible says that all 10 lepers were healed, but listen to what Jesus said to the 1 that came back and gave thanks - "Your faith has made you well."

I want you to notice some different words - Verse 14 says all the lepers were cleansed. The Greek word here means to make clean, purge, purify. So, all of the lepers were purified and healthy again.

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 cleansed that was 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 or salvation.

One commentary says that the other nine were healed merely in body, but this one was healed in a higher spiritual sense. This one thankful man received something that the ungrateful didn't.

I wonder if ungratefulness for what God has done in the past is causing you to miss out on some of God's blessings right now.

Or maybe you're just making excuses for your ungratefulness. Listen to these possible reasons that the other nine didn't return.

Maybe the 1st one wanted to wait and see if the cure was real and lasting.

Maybe the 2nd one had too much business to take care of that had been let go due to his illness.

Maybe the 3rd one said he would thank Jesus later.

Maybe the 4th one decided that he had never really had leprosy.

Maybe the 5th one said he would have gotten well anyway.

Maybe the 6th one gave the glory to the priests.

Maybe the 7th one proudly took the glory for himself, "After all, it was my idea to go see Jesus."

Maybe the 8th one said, "I can't believe he made us walk all the way to the priest. I mean, was that necessary? I'm not walking all the way back just to say thanks."

Maybe the 9th one said, "I'm thankful in my heart, so I don't have to tell him."

There's so many "reasons" not to express thanks.

It's easy to be ungrateful.

We have to make an effort to be thankful people.

So, the first thing we must do is be thankful for what God has done in our past. The 2nd thing we must do before we can thank forward is:

2- We must be thankful for what God is doing in the present

“But Pastor Deb, you don’t know the tough situation I’m in right now. There’s nothing to be thankful for. If God gave me something to be thankful for and I would be. But, how can I be thankful when my bills are overdue or I can’t find a job, 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!

Whatever your situation right now – here’s the will of God for you!
 1 Thessalonians 5:18 says:

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

The Bible teaches us that there is something to be thankful for in every situation – even in tough times.

You see, we will never be thankful until we see that God is good and no matter how circumstances may change – God never changes! God is good all the time!

Once we develop thankfulness for what God has done in the past, and for who God is right now... then...

3- We must be thankful for what God will do in the future

Thanking forward is thanking God for things that have not happened yet!
 Giving thanks for the future!
 This is prophetic thanksgiving!

It may seem hard to thank God for something that hasn’t happened yet. But what if it hasn’t happened yet BECAUSE we aren’t thankful? Could it be that if – in faith - we give thanks - THEN something would happen?

The word “then” can mean several things. It can mean a certain time.
 “It happened back then. I need it done by then.”

It can also mean next in order of time.
 “I walked to the door, then I turned.”

It can also mean a consequence of something you do.

“If you do that, then this will happen.”

I’m proposing to you that when you thank forward – in advance – THEN God releases the provision, the power, or the protection.

Thanking in advance may seem crazy, but it’s biblical. Being thankful for the future requires taking your faith to a whole new level where you walk by faith, not by sight.

You might think you will be thankful when God blesses you. But, what if God is waiting for you to be thankful before He multiplies what you have?

George Mueller operated several orphanages in England in the 1800’s. From the beginning, he refused to ask people for money – he just asked God. He had faith that God would provide – and God did – although sometimes at the last moment.

Probably the best-known story about how Mueller expressed his faith by thanking forward is the morning when the plates and bowls and cups were on the tables, but there was no food or milk.

The children sat waiting for breakfast while Mueller led them in prayer thanking God for the food they were about to receive.

Suddenly there was a knock at the door and it was the baker. He said God had awakened him at 2 AM and told him to bake bread for the orphans.

Then there was another knock at the door and it was the milkman, whose wagon had just happened to break down right in front of the orphanage. He needed to empty the wagon before he could repair it, so he wondered if the orphanage could use some free milk.

God responded to George Mueller’s faith and thanksgiving.

Obviously, we are not God and we do not have His creative power, but we do need to speak words of faith.

Joel 3:10 says *Let the weak say, 'I am strong.'*

In other words:

- I may be weak now, but I am believing and thanking God for strength.
- I might be sick now, but I am believing and thanking God for healing.
- I might be struggling now, but thank God I will be free!
- I have the faith to thank Him in advance for what He will do!

In 2 Chronicles, when Israel was faced with a vast army coming against them, they sought God and He gave them a prophetic word.

He said He would fight for them and when God fights, God wins.
2 Chronicles 20:21-22 says:

Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the Lord and to praise Him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying: "Give thanks to the Lord, for His love endures forever." As they began to sing and praise, the Lord set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated.

We read the story now and say, "Wow – that's cool – they sent the choir out first and when they gave thanks – God came through." But – how would you have felt if you were in the choir that day. It would seem a little foolish to send a choir against an army! But in God's kingdom:

- A song can defeat a sword!
- Thanks can defeat tanks!
- Worship is warfare!

We are all in a spiritual battle and one way we defeat the enemy is by thanking God IN the battle BEFORE the victory. Thanking forward is a key to winning a victory!

Or, could praise precede your deliverance as it did with Paul and Silas? Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into prison. At midnight they sang praise and gave thanks to God. THEN God sent an earthquake that set them free.

Thanksgiving preceded their deliverance. What if you need to give thanks before you are set free?

Jonah disobeyed God and was swallowed by a huge fish. Jonah repented and thanked God while He was in the fish. He said this while inside the fish in Jonah 2:9

I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving.

Immediately after this thanksgiving, the Lord commanded the fish to spit Jonah out on dry ground. Thanksgiving preceded – came before – Jonah's deliverance.

What if God is waiting for you to be thankful before your whale of a problem spits you out?

Lazarus had been dead and buried for days. When Jesus raised him from the dead, John 11:41 says:

They took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me...

Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!"

When did Jesus thank the Father? Jesus gave thanks BEFORE He raised Lazarus from the dead.

There may be some situations in your life that look too far gone to resuscitate. Maybe you feel your marriage is dead and gone. Or a relationship with a family member has been dead so long it stinks. Or there's an area in your life where you are bound up.

What if God is waiting for you to be thankful before He brings His resurrection power into your life? Thanking God releases the power of God. Are there things you are believing God to do in your future? Do you need his provision – His power – His presence?

There are many aspects to the presence of God, but this is a major truth: Thanksgiving precedes entering the presence of God. Psalm 100:3 says:

Enter His courts with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise.

Thanksgiving gets us in the door, then praise gets us into God's presence. If you need the presence of God in your current situation, begin to thank forward – thank Him in advance. True worship starts with thanksgiving.

So, do you trust God enough to thank Him in advance?

I encourage you to look at your past with thankfulness and look at your future with eyes of faith by thanking forward!

Let's have crazy radical faith by being thankful for what God will do.

Could it be that there are some things that haven't happened yet because we aren't thankful?

Could it be that if we thank in faith, then something would happen?

Could it be that God is waiting for you to be thankful before He multiplies what you have?

Thanking forward requires you to walk by faith not by sight! Thanking forward releases faith into your present and future. Are you able to look at your future with eyes of faith? Do you trust God enough to thank Him in advance?

Does anyone have the faith to stand up right now and thank God for your future? When you release your faith to thank forward, God will release the miracles that are in your future! Hallelujah!