

Having a Thankful Heart

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'Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name' (Psalm 29:2).

Let us prove our godliness by gratefulness:

1. 'It is a good thing to be thankful: 'It is good to sing praises unto our God' (*Psalm 147:1*). It is bad when the tongue (that organ of praise) is out of tune and jars by murmuring and discontent. But it is a good thing to be thankful. It is good, because this is all the creature can do to lift up God's name; and it is good because it tends to make us good. The more thankful we are, the more holy. While we pay this tribute of praise, our stock of grace increases. In other debts, the more we pay, the less we have; but the more we pay this debt of thankfulness, the more grace we have.

2. Thankfulness is the rent we owe to God. 'Kings of the earth and all people; let them praise the name of the Lord' (*Psalm 148:11, 13*). Praise is the tribute or custom to be paid into the King of heaven's exchequer. Surely while God renews our lease, we must renew our rent.

3. The great cause we have to be thankful. It is a principle grafted in nature, to be thankful for benefits. The heathen praised Jupiter for their victories.

What full clusters of mercies hang on us when we go to enumerate God's mercies! We must, with David, confess ourselves to be nonplussed: 'Many, O Lord my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, they cannot be reckoned up in order' (*Psalm 40:5*). And as God's mercies are past numbering, so they are past measuring. David takes the longest measuring line he could get. He measures from earth to the clouds, no, above the clouds, yet this measure would not reach the heights of God's mercies: 'Thy mercy is great above the heavens' (*Psalm 108:4*). Oh, how God has enriched us with his silver showers! A whole constellation of mercies has shone in our hemisphere.

(i) What temporal favors we have received! Every day we see a new tide of mercy coming in. The wings of mercy have covered us, the breast of mercy has fed us: 'the God which fed me all my life long unto this day' (*Genesis 48:15*). What snares laid for us have been broken! What fears have blown over! The Lord has made our bed, while he has made others' graves. He has taken such care of us, as if he had no-one else to take care of. Never was the cloud of providence so black, but we might see a rainbow of love in the cloud. We have been made to swim in a sea of mercy, and does not all this call for thankfulness?

(ii) That which may put another string into the instrument of our praise and make it sound louder is to consider what spiritual blessings God has conferred on us. He has given us water from the upper springs; he has opened the wardrobe of heaven and fetched us out a better garment than any of the angels wear. He has given us the best robe and put on us the ring of faith, by which we are married to him. These are mercies of the first magnitude, which deserve to have an asterisk put on them. And God keeps the best wine till last. Here he gives us mercies only in small quantities; the greatest things are laid up. Here there are some honey drops and foretastes of God's love; the rivers of pleasure are reserved for paradise. Well may we take the harp and viol and triumph in God's praise! Who can tread on these hot coals of God's love and his heart not burn in thankfulness?

4. Thankfulness is the best policy. There is nothing lost by it. To be thankful for one mercy is the way to have more. It is like pouring water into a pump which fetches out more. Musicians love to sound their trumpets where there is the best echo, and God loves to bestow his mercies where there is the best echo of thankfulness.

5. Thankfulness is a frame of heart that God delights in. If repentance is the joy of heaven, praise is the music. Bernard calls thankfulness the sweet balm that drops from a Christian. Four sacrifices God is very pleased with: the sacrifice of Christ's blood; the sacrifice of a broken heart; the sacrifice of alms; and the sacrifice of thanksgiving. Praise and thanksgiving (says Mr. Greenham) is the most excellent part of God's worship, for this shall continue in the heavenly choir when all other exercises of religion have ceased.

6. What a horrid thing ingratitude is! It gives a dye and tincture to every other sin and makes it crimson. Ingratitude is the spirit of baseness: 'They that eat thy bread have laid a wound under thee' (*Obadiah 7*). Ingratitude is worse than brutish (*Isaiah 1:3*). It is reported of Julius Caesar that he would never forgive an ungrateful person. Though God is a sin-pardoning God, he scarcely knows how to pardon for this. 'How shall I pardon thee for this? Thy children have forsaken me, when I had fed them to the full, they then committed adultery' (*Jeremiah 5:7*). Draco (whose laws were written in blood) published an edict that if any man had received a benefit from another, and it could be proved against him that he had not been grateful for it, he should be put to death. An unthankful person is a monster in nature, a paradox in Christianity. He is the scorn of heaven and the plague of earth. An ungrateful man never does well except in one thing — that is, when he dies.

7. Not being thankful is the cause of all the judgments which have lain on us. Our unthankfulness for health has been the cause of so much mortality. Our gospel unthankfulness and sermon-surfeiting has been the reason why God has put so many lights under a bushel. As Bradford said, 'My unthankfulness was the death of King Edward VI.' Who will spend money on a piece of ground that produces nothing but briars? Unthankfulness stops the golden phial of God's bounty, so that it will not drop.

Question: What shall we do to be thankful?

Answer 1: If you wish to be thankful, get a heart deeply humbled with the sense of your own vile ness. A broken heart is the best pipe to sound forth God's praise. He who studies his sins wonders that he has anything and that God should shine on such a dunghill: 'Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, but I obtained mercy' (*1 Timothy 1:13*). How thankful Paul was! How he trumpeted forth free grace! A proud man will never be thankful. He looks on all his mercies as either of his own procuring or deserving. If he has an estate, this he has got by his wits and industry, not considering that scripture, 'Thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that gives thee power to get wealth' (*Deuteronomy 8:18*). Pride stops the current of gratitude. O Christian, think of your unworthiness; see yourself the least of saints and the chief of sinners, and then you will be thankful.

Answer 2: Strive for sound evidences of God's love to you. Read God's love in the impress of holiness upon your hearts. God's love poured in will make the vessels of mercy run over with thankfulness: 'Unto him that loved us, be glory and dominion forever' (*Revelation 1:5, 6*). The deepest springs yield the sweetest water. Hearts deeply aware of God's love yield the sweetest praises.