

Communion and Thanksgiving

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[0 : 00] Focus primarily on communion and I want to give the greater time and attention to that and what these elements signify. But in connection with the season of the year, we have chosen to focus somewhat on the only appropriate theme, which is one of Thanksgiving.

You know as well as I do, there are a lot of unthankful people in the world. And there are a lot of thankful people in the world.

What makes the difference? Only one thing I can think of. From the minds and hearts of a lot of people would come a response something like this.

What do I have to be thankful about? I lost my job. Or, I don't have anything to be thankful about. I've lost my health.

I've lost my family. If you live in the Northeast, maybe you've lost your home. How can you be thankful when a tremendous storm washes away all of your visible assets?

[1 : 26] You've got nothing left. What is there to be thankful about there? Talking with a local attorney, a friend of mine some time ago who was involved in a serious automobile accident down near the Zinnia area.

And to avoid a collision or bouncing off of a collision, whichever it was of another vehicle, he ended up over in heavy traffic with his automobile upside down.

And him fastened in with a seat belt. And he knew he had some head injuries because blood was trickling down his cheek. He knew he had leg injuries because he could feel the wounds down there.

What do you have to be thankful about when you're in a situation like that? Do you know what one of the remarkable things was he told me? He said, there I was, strapped in this vehicle, upside down, multiple injuries, didn't know what all.

Actually didn't know whether I was going to live or not. And you know what, overcoming? For what? He said, I just had a profound sense of thanksgiving.

[2 : 43] And all I could do was thank the Lord. In the midst of something like that? And some of you have experienced a situation very similar to what I have experienced.

Lying beside your mate to whom you were married for almost 50 years. And wondering if the next breath they took was going to be the last one.

She'd been off the ventilator for several hours. Didn't know how long she would last, but probably not very long. And as I lay there, holding her hand and caressing her, taking one of those little swabs and trying to moisten her lips and her mouth with it, she couldn't respond.

Couldn't respond at all. And I could say the same thing. I just had a profound wave of thanksgiving that came over me. And all I could do was just thank the Lord for all of the wonderful years that he had given us.

And as I got to thinking about this, I asked myself the question, Marth, can you think of some kind of a situation, some kind of dire circumstance, some kind of real painful gut-wrenching thing for which thanksgiving is just not appropriate?

[4 : 23] And I'm still thinking, and I haven't come up with one. The only thing that really separates unthankful people from thankful people is perspective.

That's it. People are thankful based upon what they see and know and understand. What they appreciate about what true reality really is.

And if you have a handle on it, and you have that kind of perspective, there's only one place that you can get it. And that's from the scriptures. Because the Bible gives us God's perspective. It tells us the situation as it is viewed through the eyes of God. And it's very accurate.

Sometimes painfully accurate. But it's very accurate. And it gives us the real scoop. Our perspective, which is the only one we've got, but it's so limited.

[5 : 37] Don't you understand that? Don't you understand that you really don't see tomorrow at all? We have our plans for tomorrow and what we intend to do and all the rest, but we all know how subject they are to being short-circuited and not realized.

So our perspective is such that we don't know what's coming from one day to the next or even from one hour to the next. But if you know that God has a perspective and his is accurate and all you really want to do is just get in line with it and tap into his perspective, what it will do is it will make your entire outlook on life radically different.

So far, I have concluded. And if you can think of one, I would appreciate it because I always enjoy being enlightened. But so far, I have not been able to think of any situation in which I could possibly find myself where it would not be appropriate to give thanks.

And again, it all has to do with perspective. I guess there's probably no way that we could enumerate the things for which we could or should be thankful, but there are some biggies. I think of them as life-changing realities to plug into these things for which to be thankful.

[7 : 13] And the first one, of course, is quite obvious. It's thankful for life. Just for life itself. And not everybody is.

And there are some biblical characters that weren't very thankful for life. Remember Job? I curse the day I was born. What a black, dark day it was when someone came in and announced to my father, you have a son.

Great cause for rejoicing. And Job says, big deal! I curse the day I was born. And you know what Job's problem was, of course.

Was perspective. He just had his own limited perspective. And his miserable friends who tried to comfort him, and we would put quotation marks around comfort, they weren't very big on perspective either, because they didn't see any further than Job did.

In fact, not as far as Job did. So, again, it's all a matter of perspective. But this is a big item. To be thankful for life and its privileges. God has created a world, and he has given you and me the privilege of living and functioning in this world.

[8 : 34] And yes, it's got its downsides. It's got its heartaches and its problems and trials and all the rest of it. But that just goes with the territory of the fallen world. But if you have this perspective thing that I'm talking about, then you know that who Jesus Christ is and what he accomplished on that cross makes everything in your life that looks enormous and painful and difficult, makes it pale by comparison.

When you've got the right perspective, when you've got the right thing to compare it with. So, I'm thankful for the sovereignty of our God, who orders all things after the counsel of his own will.

I am just so great. You know, he really lets me sleep well at night to know that God's in charge. I don't have to stay awake and worry about anything. Because he knows what he's doing. We've got inflammatory things going on now in the Mideast.

The place has been a tinderbox for decades. And now it looks like the tinderbox is being ignited. And other surrounding nations may jump into the fray.

And we don't know how this thing is going to play out. It could very well involve more from the United States. More, perhaps, blood and treasure.

[9 : 52] We hope not, but it may. But God is absolutely sovereign. And when I use that word sovereign, I mean God not only has the ability to rule and reign in his world, but he has the right to do so.

He has the moral right to do so. He's created all things. For his pleasure, they were and are created. I've already alluded to this, but we need to be thankful for the nation we are in.

I realize that we are all prejudiced as Americans and we think that this country is the greatest country on the earth. Well, actually it is.

But I'm somewhat biased. We have enjoyed things here that are only dreams and visions of other nations that never come close to the prosperity, the standard of living, the benefits and the blessings that we enjoy here.

It's just absolutely remarkable. Nobody is still trying to get out of this country. And there are plenty of people still trying to get in because there is something undeniable about the American dream, about living in the United States of America.

[11 : 14] And I'm thankful for the gift of volition and its attendant responsibilities and opportunities. I am so glad that God did not create us automatons or robots.

He has endowed us with a volition, with a power to make choices. And it is an awesome responsibility because along with the power to make choices, there comes the accountability of the choices that we make.

And the better perspective you have, the better your choices will be and the more pleasant the accountability will be. So perspective is very key to this whole thing.

And do you realize why we're here this morning? Why there is church? Why people get together like this, like we do all over the world. Why are we doing this?

You know, you could boil it all down to, we want to change people's perspective. And perspective is changed by information that is received and processed.

[12 : 22] Because you think and you act based on what you know. The reason so many people make so many bad choices is because they don't know what they need to know in order to make good choices.

We call them ignorant or uneducated or unwise. And they make foolish decisions that go along with it that produce a lot of pain and a lot of heartache and a lot of deprivation and all the rest of it because they don't know what they need to know.

Hosea wrote of his own people, God's covenant nation. And he said, My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Knowledge provides perspective.

And last but not least, we are thankful for the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. When you come and place your faith and trust in Jesus Christ, He receives you.

He cleanses you. He pardons you. He forgives you. He makes you a new creation. He gives you a whole new life and a whole new perspective.

[13 : 41] If any man be in Christ, he's a new creation. Old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new. That's the miracle of regeneration.

That's the essence of the gospel, this good news that we proclaim. Because when somebody embraces this good news, when they make this volitional, willful decision and put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ, they are visited by the Spirit of God who regenerates them and makes them a new person on the inside.

And no psychiatrist can touch that. Can't be accomplished on a psychiatric couch. This is a divine work of grace. It's called regeneration.

Jesus called it being born again. It's starting life all over from a new position with a new perspective. It's just incredible. Just amazing. I cannot get from my mind, nor do I want to, that wonderful day, December 8, 1956, when I became a new creation in Christ and it completely changed everything.

[15 : 06] As they say, the rest is history. My perspective was radically altered on that day and I've been so grateful ever since.

Have you had your perspective changed? Have you come to a place in your life, and I suspect that the vast majority of you have, maybe every single one of you have, come to that place in your life where you recognized that you were unacceptable before a holy God and that you really needed something that you could not provide.

And that's why Jesus died. That's why there was a Calvary. Because he did for us what we could not do for ourselves, and he did it solely because he really, really loved you.

That was his perspective. And God's perspective is so wonderful, he wants you to have it. Isn't that something? Wonderful. And I am thankful for his promise to come again.

Because that's what he's going to do. And on the night that he was betrayed, our Lord took these elements, and he blessed them, he held up this common loaf of bread, I guess we'd probably call it something much like a pancake.

[16 : 37] And he tore a piece from it, and he handed it to the next one, and each one tore a piece from this loaf of pancake-like bread.

And Jesus said, this is my body, which is given for you. And you know what? There wasn't one of those apostles who had the foggiest idea of what he was talking about.

I can just see Peter and James and John looking at each other quizzically. Jesus said, this is my body. What's he talking about? This is a piece of bread.

This is my body, which is given for you. I could just see Peter leaning over to Andrew and say, what did he say? He said, this is my body, which is given for you. What do you mean by that?

I don't know. Do what he said. Eat a piece of it. And then the cup. This cup, said he, this cup is the new covenant in my blood.

[17 : 45] Well, what in the world did that mean? We kind of think we know because we've celebrated these elements a number of times, and we know what the blood represents, the red juice, the cup, and the bread represents his body, and it's not a mystery to us.

We've got that all figured out. But try to put yourself in the position of those poor disciples. And they didn't know at all that in less than 18 hours, this one to whom they were listening was going to be hanging on the cross.

He didn't have a clue. They didn't know that. Now, after the fact, and after the resurrection, it would all make so much sense to them. You know why?

Because their perspective had changed. Information had been introduced. Experiences had been realized that changed their perception marvelously.

But that night, it must have been just so strange to them. What is he talking about? He takes a chalice and takes a sip from it.

[19 : 00] A sip of wine. And says, this is the new covenant in my blood. And we've talked about this before and the significance of it, but I hope I never get over it.

The old covenant, commonly referred to as the Old Testament, the old covenant that Moses brought down from the mount when he spent the 40 days up there and came down with the tablets of the law and he presented them to the nation of Israel and they said, all that the Lord has said we will do.

You go back up there, Moses, and you tell God, he's got a deal. If he wants to be our God, we'll be his people and we'll do everything he says. Well, we know that was going to be very short-lived. But that's what they said anyway. And Moses, they slew an animal and they took the blood of that animal and Moses took a hyssop branch, vegetation branch, and dipped it in the blood of that animal.

And here he's holding up this bloody branch just dripping with blood from this animal and he sprinkled the blood on the tablets of the law and then he sprinkled the blood out towards the mass of people signifying the togetherness of the law of Moses and the people, the commandments and the people.

[20 : 42] It was kind of like a marriage that was signed or sealed in blood. And the blood thing adds a measure of solemnity and seriousness to it because the blood represents something that died.

And that gave a dimension of sobriety to the whole affair. There was a life that was shed to provide that blood. We talk about signing a document and really meaning.

What do you want me to sign it in blood? As if that would give an extra degree of credibility to it. but that night when he took that chalice and held it up and said this cup is the new covenant in my blood.

What was different? The perspective. And his blood would ratify the new covenant.

if you want an excellent commentary on that read the epistle to the Hebrews in the New Testament. It really spells it out.

[22 : 03] When you understand these things and it gives you the perspective that's needed we ought to be able to come to this table with a lot more gratitude a lot more intelligence and a lot better perspective than what we would have otherwise.

So when we gather together in connection with our Lord's second coming which I said would be maybe the last thing that I wanted to mention that we would be thankful for Jesus said as often as you eat of this bread and drink of this cup you do show forth the Lord's death until he comes.

And that's something I'm really thankful for. Jesus is coming again and that's our perspective. That's God's perspective. Would you open your hymnal please to number 797.

797 and we'll begin by singing just the first verse and as we sing we'll ask you to stand and elders who are going to assist us can come forward then please.

May we stand 797. Amen. Thank you. Be seated, please.

[24 : 15] Amen.

The Lord's Supper, as opposed to the Passover meal, which I think they also participated in. Judas was going to slip out in the night.

And the eleven had no idea where he was going, but they suspected that he was probably going to get something in connection with the feast, the Passover feast.

And grace people have risen to the occasion so many times and have extended benevolent help to those, most of whom are outside our congregation. And we appreciate that.

So in order to keep that funded, when we serve communion like this, we ordinarily receive a freewill offering. We encourage people to give in accordance with your desire and your ability.

And ordinary giving for the support and ministry of the church can be left in the offering box that's attached to the wall outside. But when we have a communion service, we designate 100% of those funds to go for needy families and situations that arise inside and outside the congregation.

[33 : 32] And from time to time, people bring situations to our attention that we're able to address. And we want all of you to feel free to do that. So we will wait upon you now in accordance with our standard policy.

And you may give as you have interest and ability. This will be strictly for the Elders Benevolent Fund. Elders Benevolent Fund.

Elders Benevolent Fund.

Now, if we may please, for the last time, we'll sing verse 4. And that will be our benediction for the morning. Number 797 and the last stanza.

And that will be our benediction for the Lord.

[35 : 43] Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord.

And after they had sung a hymn, they went out.