

THE HEART OF A THANKFUL MAN - PS. 103

THE LIFE OF DAVID IN THE PSALMS #15

When George McCluskey's first daughter was born, he became burdened with the responsibility of raising a godly woman in the difficult days in which he was living. Realizing his own inadequacies as a parent, George made a commitment to pray everyday for his daughter. He would thank God for the healthy girl that God had entrusted to him, and pray that God would work in her life to make her a woman of God. In time, God added a second daughter to the McCluskey household, and George included her on his prayer list as well - thanking God for her everyday and praying that God would make her a godly woman.

George McCluskey prayed everyday for his 2 daughters. And eventually they both received the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal savior, and grew up to be women of great character and faith. Both of these women married men who went into full time Christian service for the Lord and eventually had families of their own. Together, they brought 4 girls and 1 boy into the world as grandchildren for George McCluskey. And as each one was born, George added a new grandchild to his prayer list. By now, George was praying a full hour each day, from 11:00 AM until noon, thanking God for those committed to his care and praying for the continued spiritual growth of his 2 daughters and his 5 grandchildren. The 5 grandchildren all grew up to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as personal savior. All 4 of the female grandchildren married men who were in full time Christian work and the single male grandchild became a pastor.

The first 2 children born to the next generation as great grandchildren were

both boys, cousins born in the same year. George McCluskey faithfully put them on his prayer list and prayed for these 2 great grandchildren every day. These 2 boys also received the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal savior and committed their lives to following His will. After these cousins graduated from High School, they decided that they would go to the same college. It was during their sophomore year, that one cousin felt called to the gospel ministry. The other cousin felt the Lord leading in a different direction. He had an interest in the field of psychology. He admitted feeling somewhat guilty because all of his relatives back to his great grandfather had gone into some kind of full time Christian work. But he knew in his heart that God wanted him to go into the field of psychology - and that was what his great grandfather had prayed for - for him to follow God's leading in his life.

Eventually, this great grandson of George McCluskey who had been prayed for for 4 generations, earned his doctor's degree and became the Chairman of the Pediatrics department at the University of California School of Medicine and the Director of Behavioral Research in the Division of Child Development at the Children's Hospital of Los Angeles. And interestingly enough, the books that he has written and his radio program that spans our nation have been the most visible source of encouragement and support to Christian families of all of George McCluskey's descendants. But we must never forget that the ministry of James Dobson that has impacted our country so much started in the prayer room of a godly great grandfather who continuously thanked God for his blessings and faithfully prayed everyday for his children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

It is impossible to calculate the impact that even a single person can have on his future generations and the course of world events if that person is committed to obeying God, has a grateful spirit and is a person of devotion and prayer.

We have been studying the life of such an individual during these past summer Sundays. His name was David. He lived some 3,000 years ago. But babies are still named after him, one of the most important cities in the world still claims to be his city, military academies still study his battle plans, and Christians who are committed to growing in their relationship with God still study his life. We have been studying the life of David in an autobiographical way, through some of the Psalms which he wrote. We have not been able to look at all of the 73 Psalms that we know he authored, but we have seen many lessons that he learned in life from both victories and failures that he experienced.

This morning, we want to look at a characteristic of David that greatly attributed to his success in life. In fact, I believe that this characteristic was one of the major reasons why David was able to achieve so much and journey from the Shepherd's tent to the Palace throne. David was a man who generally had a grateful spirit. Now I am not claiming that David never felt depressed or angry or sorry for himself. We have looked at Psalms that picture David in these states. But these were not characteristic of David's general attitude. They were the exception, not the rule for David's life. Generally speaking, David was a person who was filled with thanksgiving to God. He never lost the wonder of his being chosen to be King of Israel. He never took his position for granted. He didn't allow the pressures of the throne to make him become cynical or bitter.

Most Bible scholars list Psalm 103 among the last that David penned. In this Psalm his grateful spirit is revealed. I would invite you to look with me briefly at this Psalm this morning, especially noting 4 reasons why David was grateful in spirit towards God.

1. David was grateful because it was the right thing to do - this is evidenced in the commands that he gives in the first 2 verses.

READ Ps. 103:1,2

*1. Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. ²
Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits --*

Now there is an observation that is interesting to note here. Both phrases *Praise the Lord* and *forget not all his benefits* are found in command form in the Hebrew language. They are not mere statements of fact, they are not mere suggestions, but rather they are commandments to be obeyed. David writing in this way shows that he understood one of his duties to be gratitude to the Lord. To praise the Lord and to remember God's blessings were commandments to be obeyed for David.

It is important for each of us to realize that God is the giver of all the good gifts that we have in life and one of the central duties of man given throughout the Bible is to be grateful to God for life and for all that we possess. Gratitude on our part is just common courtesy to God in response to the many gifts which he has graciously given to us. And we all know this in our hearts. This is one reason why a grateful person feels better and an ungrateful person feels more miserable. Often in life, our overall satisfaction with ourselves is linked with our faithfulness

in discharging our duties. We all have responsibilities which we recognize and we frankly feel better about ourselves when we faithfully dispatch those duties than when we neglect them.

Any parent will tell you that she can immediately tell what kind of day a child has had at school when the child walks into the house in the afternoon. If the student has gotten all his work done and behaved himself, then he usually walks in with a cheery smile eager to show some of his school papers with stars and good grades. On the other hand, if the student has not finished his work and gotten into trouble at school, he kind of slinks into the house and the parent knows to ask, *What happened at school today?* Any student feels better knowing that he has successfully performed his duties at school.

That pattern continues with us right through life. There are few better feelings than the satisfied weariness at the end of the day when we have accomplished what we set out to do. But we are all frustrated when we conclude a day in which few things have gone right and we did not get what we consider to be our duties done. The accomplishment of duties naturally brings with it a measure of personal satisfaction.

Many people are not at peace with themselves in the spiritual realm because they do not feel confidence that they are fulfilling their spiritual responsibilities before God. Frankly, if we are not maintaining a thankful spirit, we cannot have complete spiritual contentment. The reason for this is the simple fact that gratitude towards God is a duty that we have - it is a commandment given in the Scriptures for us to obey. It is not an option - it is rather a spiritual responsibility. The

Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica: *Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (1 Thess. 5:18)*

David's use of the command voice here indicates that he realized the importance of this truth even though he lived hundreds of years before Paul penned those words.

2. But we must move on. David was also grateful because of all that God had done for him and given him. David's gratitude was not just a grudging sense of duty - but it was rather a natural expression in response to all that God had done for him.

READ Ps. 103:2-7

² Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits -- ³ who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, ⁴ who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, ⁵ who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. ⁶ The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. ⁷ He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel:

David here wasn't saying *thanks* to God just because he had to - he was rather expressing his gratitude to God from a heart that was overflowing with praise for all that God had done for him.

*the blessing of forgiveness of sins. What a wonderful, priceless gift this is from God. God sent his one and only son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to die upon the cross of Calvary so that we might know forgiveness of sins. God's forgiveness is complete forgiveness. David would later expand this thought by saying, *as far as*

the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. vs. 12

He does not say as far as the north is from the south because that would limit God's forgiveness. A person can only travel so far north until the north pole is crossed and he begins heading south. But it is different traveling east or west. One can begin travelling east and can continue to go around and around the globe always traveling east forever. That is how great God's forgiveness has been towards us. If we have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ and received this priceless gift of love from God, God has removed our sins to be remembered against us no more.

*David goes on to mention the gift of physical health and healing. God is ultimately the giver of health. And while we certainly appreciate the many medical advances that have added so much to the quality of our lives and the medical personnel who have dedicated themselves to helping others through physical difficulties, only God can heal the body. Doctors can cut out tumors, sew up incisions, and prescribe medication to fight infections, but only God himself can bring about healing.

*the blessings of deliverance from life's dangers and the intangible blessings of love and compassion. What would the world be like if there were no love or compassion? Have you ever thought about that? Who would want to live in a world that was completely filled with hatred, where there was no love or compassion. Again, God ultimately is the author of all love and compassion. We have the ability to love because He first loved us and created us with the capacity to love one another.

*All of the good things that we enjoy in life. James said that every good gift comes from above. The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, *for everything that God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving.* (1 Tim. 4:4)

Just think for a moment of all that God gives to us that we really don't need to survive. Now we need food, water, and shelter to survive - and God has promised to supply those needs for his children. But think for a moment of all that you have that falls into a category beyond those bare necessities. The appliances that bring such ease to our lives, the transportation that gives us such mobility, the many items for entertainment and recreation - each one a good gift that God has given to us.

*And what about justice - are you happy for that. I know that we often complain about the abuses and injustices in the world - and there are many that we could mention. But what if there wasn't any standard of justice at all? What kind of a world would we live in then?

God is the reason for any justice that we have at all. He is a just and righteous God, and He has created us in his image with an inner sense of right and wrong. What a blessing justice is to us.

*And then David goes on to speak of God's revelation to us. He has made known his ways through Moses and the prophets. What a privilege it is to have God's revelation to us. What would we do in life without His word? What if we didn't know what God expected out of us and had to just guess at what was pleasing to him? But God has not left us without His truth. Over a period of some

1,500 years, using more than 40 human authors, God carefully and progressively has given his truth to us.

*Are you happy for forgiveness of sins, for health, for love and compassion, for every good thing you possess, for justice and righteousness in the world, for the Bible? Then say *thanks* to God because He has given all of these benefits to us.

3. But now let's move to a third reason why David had a grateful spirit. As David had grown in his knowledge of the Lord, David had become more and more grateful just for who God was.

READ Ps. 103:8-12

⁸ The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. ⁹ He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; ¹⁰ he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. ¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; ¹² as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

*God is compassionate and gracious - full of mercy and grace. Mercy is God not giving us what we deserve; grace is God giving us what we don't deserve. We deserve God's wrath and judgment. For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. God poured out his righteous wrath up his one and only son, the Lord Jesus Christ, so that we could be spared. God's compassionate mercy is not giving us what we really deserve. But God didn't stop there. As we are born again into God's family, we are justified, declared to be righteous in God's sight. God

made the Lord Jesus Christ to be sin for us, so that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. That's grace - God giving us wonderful blessings that we don't deserve.

*God is patient - slow to anger. And Loving - abounding in love. Patience is such a key virtue in life and necessary in so many areas. Someone defined patience in this way: Patience is the ability to throttle your motor when you feel like stripping the gears.

*Now if we have trouble with impatience with the small, seemingly insignificant plans that we have, just think of how wonderful it is that our God is patient. After all, God has designed the perfect plan for the universe. But he is patient, willing to work the plan in his own perfect timing.

*A farmer will never reap the fruit if he plucks the blossoms. God is a patient God, waiting for the fruit to be born in its season.

*And God is loving - not vengeful or vindictive. Someone made the observation, *Love looks through a telescope; envy through a microscope*. Just think of what life would be like if an infinitely perfect God stood watching over us with the attitude of immediately correcting everyone of our mistakes, no matter how minor. Life would be intolerable. Aren't you happy that God is a God of love. Love covers a multitude of sins. God delights in providing atonement for his people so that the guilt and shame of their sins might be covered.

When we consider the source of David's thoughts here, the message becomes even more profound. Part of the statement that David uses here reflecting upon the character of God is taken directly from Exodus 34 in a quote given by God

about himself. As Moses was going up into the mount to receive the law for the second time, having chiseled out 2 new tablets of stone, the bible says in Exodus 34:6, *And God passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, The Lord, The Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.*

When we consider the historical situation of this quotation that David uses in this Psalm, the wonderful character of God becomes even more pronounced. God had redeemed his people from the bondage of Egyptian slavery. He had brought them forth out of Egypt which was then the most powerful nation on earth with a mighty hand. The Israelites had even walked out of Egypt laden down with great riches that the Egyptians had freely given to them - something unheard of in human history. And God had brought them to the foot of Mt. Sinai in order to give to them his law, his revelation which reflected his character. But then, as Moses tarried in the presence of a patient God on Mt. Sinai, these Israelites had the nerve to make another god out of gold, a golden calf, and worship it. Imagine that. Using the very gold that God had moved the Egyptian people to give to the Israelites as an added blessing to make another god to worship. What would you have done to the Israelites if you had been god?

Do you know what God did? He demonstrated his compassion and mercy towards his people by even forgiving this great atrocity and affront to his holy character. And as Moses came up to that mountain the second time, with this example fresh in his mind, God revealed himself as the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, and abounding in love.

David was thankful for who God was - for His character and attributes. And the more we get to know God, the more thankful we will become for the magnificence of his infinite being.

4. Finally, David was grateful for the relationship that he had with the Lord. Listen to David's words in verses 13-14:

¹³ As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; ¹⁴ for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.

*Just as a model earthly father has compassion on his children and uses his strength and wisdom for their benefit, so God loves his children and has made all of his limitless resources available to them. We don't have to journey through this life in the strength of our own flesh. We are just animated dust. There is no strength really there. We were formed from the union of 2 cells and everyone of us will return back to dust one day. But the good news is that every believer has a heavenly father who knows exactly what we are and loves us in spite of it, and every believer has a heavenly father who has committed all of his limitless resources to the welfare and protection and growth of his children. We can be thankful for that.

Now, in closing, I trust that you are beginning to see a pattern here. David, in this Psalm, is building a stairlike progression that is reflected in the heart of a person with a grateful spirit.

Often, for the Christian, gratitude as with other Christian virtues, starts because of a sense of duty. The Christian who desires with all of his heart to walk

in integrity before the Lord submits himself to obey God with an undivided heart.

But then, as one grows just a little bit in the Lord, and as he begins to experience the many blessings that God generously bestows upon his children, he is lead to be grateful to God in response to all of the benefits that God provides.

And as a person grows in his knowledge of God and learns more and more about him, he then begins to realize the awesome character of a God who alone is worthy of all praise and adoration and worship. And the Christian is moved to be grateful to God just for who he is apart from a sense of duty or any of the gifts that He gives.

But then the final and highest level of thanksgiving comes. As we grow in our relationship with God so that we experience the intimacy of a heavenly father, and as we walk in daily fellowship with this One who has become our very life, we are then lead to live the grateful life that God intended for us. This is a life that fills our hearts with joy and peace and contentment. This is the life that makes any other type of living just a shadow in comparison.

David knew this kind of living. That is what made him a man after God's own heart. And each of us can know this type of life as well. For God is great enough to have the most intimate relationship of a heavenly father with every single one of his children.