

Count Your Blessings

Ephesians 1: 3-14

(preached July 14, 2024)

When I first read this, in the English Standard Version, I was struck with all of the blessings that God has given us. I read it in *The Message* version and I thought that it was even clearer. What I thought of was a tradition that I am thankful that our family did not practice. At Thanksgiving you go around the table and say what you are thankful for, after God, family, home, pumpkin pie, there isn't much to say, or is there? This is what I want to explore today. But first, the history lesson.

Ephesus was on the west coast of Turkey, and was a leading city. It was a great cultural and religious center. It was the principal city of Asia Minor. East met west in Ephesus. According to Acts chapter 20, Paul first went to Ephesus in 53 AD. 2 years later he went again, only this time stayed for at least 2 years. 10 years later Paul is in Rome where he wrote this letter. My history reference also mentions that at this time, 62 AD, he sent off the letters to the Ephesians, Colossians, and to Philemon. Those were very important letters that Paul sent at that time.

Depending on your version, the word saints is often found in this letter and in the epistles overall. What it meant back then was one who had trusted Jesus as Savior, a disciple and a member of the group referred to as, People of the Way. Basically one who has been set apart. The saints were faithful and full of grace. The word grace appears 12 times in Ephesians. Grace is one of those words that we know what it means till we have to define it. Grace is the kindness of God towards undeserving people. I will repeat, the kindness of God towards undeserving people. Shorter definition, unmerited favor. Liz Gratsky shared in a Bible study this phrase: God's Riches At Christ's Expense GRACE. We have all of this in Christ Jesus. That phrase is used 27 times in this letter.

Let's get back to the point of blessings and being thankful. The aim of this passage is for the Christian/Saint to see all of the riches/ blessings that they have in Christ. First let's look at the words blessings and blessed. These are also words that we know until someone asks, what does it mean? Blessings is God's favor and protection. When you ask for a blessing you are asking for divine protection or a little gift from the heavens. I just thought that we use the phrase a blessing at meal time, are we praying that we don't get food poisoning as our divine protection. Or should we say that the meal becomes blessed, which means made holy, divinely or happily favored.

In verses 4 - 6, Paul just doesn't say that as Christians we should be thankful for being in the family of God, being saved, if you will. Instead he elaborates. God takes us to the high places, we are the focus of His love, He adopted us, and we are the recipient of His lavish gift-giving by the hand of Jesus. We need to elaborate in our praise. I know it is hard. I am a 10th generation Yankee, from Scottish roots. We, or at least I, don't elaborate much. But we need to count our blessings daily, even hourly!! God continues to bless us.

Now in Verses 7 - 10 Paul lists what Jesus does for us, on top of what God does. Because of the sacrifice of the Messiah, we are free people. And again Paul lists what we are free from and not

just barely free but ABUNDANTLY FREE! He provides us everything we could possibly need. In Philippians 4:19 Paul writes” And my God will supply every need of yours, according to His riches in Glory.” Now remember that Paul was writing this to basically poor people, so the definition of every need, may be more spiritual than physical. God will provide your spiritual needs, your peace of mind to help you go through what you are going through. And they were also more than likely suffering some kind of persecution, but God was with them.

In verses 11 - 12, Paul talks about how Christ helps us find out who we are and what we are living for, and again not just living but GLORIOUS LIVING! Do you ever think about who you are, what your gifts are, and if you are living the best that you can? And again not just materially but spiritually?

Paul talked about the blessings of God the Father, Jesus, and now it is the Holy Spirit. Through Him we found ourselves home free, delivered. And we should be enjoying a praising and glorious life.

Paul got very specific in the blessings from God. We should also learn to be specific in looking at our own lives and being thankful for our blessings from God. Back to our Thanksgiving meal, maybe we need to be more specific, not just our home, but what makes it a home? The people that share our home with us, the pictures of family, past and present, yes the structure, but what about that makes it special to us? God blesses us, gives us His favor, we need to be more aware of everything and everyone He puts into our daily lives.

I am thankful for the Tuesday morning walking group. It has diminished in size from a few years ago, but it is not the exercise. Trust me we are not doing an Olympic mile, more a 30 plus minute mile. It is the fellowship, the learning and sharing of lives. I am thankful for every interaction that I have with my Church family, I continually learn from all of you.

Now I know that there are people going through hard times, pain, sorrow, dealing with hurting/sick loved ones, too much on your plate, seems like you are having trouble keeping your head above water. You know what I mean and it is hard to look at your blessings now. I am not glossing over what you are going through. God is with you, you may have to look harder but He is with you. Look back a day, week, month and look at what is happening or happened, and I am sure you will see the evidence of His presence. When you are going through something it is hard to see God in it, but He is there. Think of the poem Footsteps, during the hardest times of your life Jesus is carrying you. The chorus from the song, ”Just be Held” by Casting Crowns says “Your world’s not falling apart, it’s falling into place. I’m on the throne, stop holding on, and just be held.” You are being blessed and loved.

In March my pool died. I found someone to service it, Whiteley Electric. specifically, Bert Ahart. It was determined that a part was broken. I ordered a new part that came in and it was installed, and it too was broken. Ordered another replacement, he changed the parts and it worked this time. BUT, it was discovered another part was broken. Ordered and replaced it. I left on vacation for 10 days, returned and the heater wasn’t working. Called and Bart came out again. They could only get the heater to work through the electric and not the gas. I was happy as I had wanted to change the gas back to electricity. I have solar. Through this all it was

frustrating, not the world is ending but just aggravating. God blessed me after all of this. I had my pool heated by my solar electricity. Did I see this as I was going through it? NO. Writing this, I looked back and saw my blessing.

Let me conclude with 2 other songs I thought of concerning blessings and being blessed. Irving Berlin's Count Your Blessings from White Christmas. "When I am tired and cannot sleep I count my blessings instead of sheep, and I fall asleep counting my blessings."

More modern is a song "Counting My Blessings" by Seph Schlueter "God I'm still counting my blessings, All that You've done in my life, The more that I look in the details, the more of Your goodness I find. Father on this side of heaven, I know that I'll run out of time, but I will keep counting my blessings, knowing that I can't count that high"

Let's practice counting our blessings, saying thank you God, and seeing how high we can count! Amen

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