

**The Blessings of Thanksgiving– Sunday September 15<sup>th</sup> 2013.**

*I rejoice at Your word,*

*As one who finds great spoil.*

<sup>163</sup> *I hate and despise falsehood,*

*But I love Your law.*

<sup>164</sup> *Seven times a day I praise You,*

*Because of Your righteous ordinances.*

<sup>165</sup> *Those who love Your law have great peace,*

*And nothing causes them to stumble. (Psalm 119:162-165)*

Beloved in the Lord,

How often in any given day do you complain about something and how often are you thankful to God for something? I would like you to honestly consider this question. It is a serious question, and your answer to yourself, may well surprise you. I believe that it is very beneficial to take a stock of oneself on a regular basis. To assess what comes out of our mouths. What sort of a testimony do we have? What sort of witness are we?

The Word of God tells us that ***“Out of the fullness of the heart, the mouth speaks.”*** (***Matthew 12:34***) This means that if your heart is full of bitterness and hatred and unforgiveness, then that is what will come out of your mouth. On the other hand if your heart is full of love, and forgiveness, joy and peace, then this will be reflected in your words. You will speak in a manner that brings glory and honour to God.

The author of Psalm 119 tells us that he praises God seven times a day. He thanks God for His Word, for His righteous ordinances. The number seven is a significant one in Biblical terms. Seven is the number of God, it is the number of completeness. This means that the Psalmist is really saying that he is continually and completely thankful to God for His Word. He is living with a right attitude toward God and His Holy Word.

I have given you this advice before, but it is worth repeating again today. Take a blank sheet of paper and draw a vertical line down the middle of the page. On the left hand side list all the things you want to complain about. On the right hand side of the page list all the things you should thank God for. You will find that if you are honest, there are far more things to be thankful for, than to complain about.

Whingeing, complaining, murmuring is neither pleasing to God, nor honouring Him in anyway. We have considered a fair bit lately, the absolute truth that God is sovereign and that nothing happens outside of His knowledge or without His permission. Everything ultimately happens according to His plan and purpose. We have considered the truth of Romans 8:28 which says: ***“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”***

The words all things mean exactly what they say – all things! Logically then, when we whinge and complain about something then we are blaming God, and saying that He has done us a disservice. This certainly does not glorify or honour Him in anyway.

We glorify and honour God, when we are able to give thanks and praise Him, even when things are hard, and are not working out the way that we would like them to. This is only possible if we keep our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus the author and finisher of our salvation. The moment we turn our eyes off Jesus and start to look at our circumstances, then we lose our peace and our joy. We begin to murmur and too complain and we become ungrateful for all that He is doing. We lose perspective very very quickly.

We see this truth so clearly in the Book of Exodus. God had a continuing battle with the Israelites. With ten mighty signs God freed them from oppression and slavery and delivered them from the hand of Pharaoh. He led them safely through the Red Sea, but it wasn't long before they were murmuring and complaining. God gave them Manna from Heaven, the food of angels, and they complained saying they wanted meat. Over and over we see the pattern of them complaining, God unleashing His anger, Moses interceding, God's anger abating.

In the end none of those aged 20 and over entered the Promised land except for Joshua and Caleb. God made them wander in the wilderness for forty years until that generation had died out. Only their children made it into Canaan.

The problem was that they so quickly lost sight of God, and followed after their flesh. Last Sunday we thought about the fact that we need to have our priorities right. We need to put Spirit first, then soul and then body last. We need to live and walk in the Spirit.

One way in which we do this, and this is a very powerful way, is to live a life of praise and thanksgiving. To cultivate a spirit of thanksgiving, to have an attitude of gratitude. The Psalmist wrote: ***“Seven times a day I praise You, Because of Your righteous ordinances.”***

From my own experience, I know how powerful the attitude of gratitude is, how powerful the praise life is. When I go through periods where I want to murmur and complain, I try to take stock of my thoughts and force myself to praise God, to offer Him thanksgiving. I don't always succeed, but I try. I try to turn everything around for good by thanking God.

For example: Some nights when I am tired and don't feel like cooking dinner for my family, and I feel a spirit of complaining coming upon me; I ward it off by thanking God that He has given me a family to cook for. I thank Him that He has given me the ability to cook. I thank Him for the food that He so abundantly provides. You know, when I do this, my whole attitude changes. A peace and joy fill my heart. Everything becomes easier to do. Your feet become lighter and everything seems easier. We read in Isaiah: ***“Why do you say, O Jacob, and assert, O Israel, “My way is hidden from the Lord,***

***And the justice due me escapes the notice of my God”?***

***<sup>28</sup> Do you not know? Have you not heard?***

***The Everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth***

***Does not become weary or tired.***

***His understanding is inscrutable.***

***<sup>29</sup> He gives strength to the weary,***

***And to him who lacks might He increases power.***

***<sup>30</sup> Though youths grow weary and tired,***

***And vigorous young men stumble badly,***

***<sup>31</sup> Yet those who wait for the Lord***

***Will gain new strength;***

***They will mount up with wings like eagles,***

***They will run and not get tired,***

***They will walk and not become weary.” (Is.40:27-31)***

Praise God, You see, when we thank and praise God, what we are doing is testifying/confessing that we believe in His sovereignty, and we believe that He is in control and knows exactly what He is doing. Believing on Him, praising Him, draws us close to His heart. This in turn renews our strength.

God is all powerful. all knowing and ever present everywhere. When we are closely joined to Him, then we tap into His power and His wisdom and all that is His. God’s power is creative and regenerative and it rejuvenates us.

Where God is worshipped and adored, there He is in a special way. We read this in Psalm 22: ***“Yet You are holy, O You who are enthroned upon the praises of Israel.” (Psalm 22:3)***

God is enthroned upon the praises of His people. He dwells among those who praise and honour Him. He sits upon His throne and is in control and when we praise Him we are blessed. When we have a right attitude toward God, and when we praise Him and bless His name, then we are blessed in return.

I cannot not mention Paul and Silas, who were imprisoned for their preaching. They were in a bad way. They had been beaten and placed in stocks in the darkest part of the prison. They had little hope of getting out and were likely to be killed. Did they do what we would have probably done? No. They didn’t complain or give up in despair and say God has forgotten us – no they did quite the opposite. Around midnight the other prisoners heard them singing songs of praise and glorifying God!

Suddenly God sent an earthquake, their chains fell off, the prison doors sprung open and they were free. Hallelujah. The prison guard and his family were converted that very night and were baptised. Glory to God.

You see praising God, set them free and not only that it resulted in a whole family being saved.

Praising God is liberating. It liberates us from all the shackles that bind us and also it gives a positive testimony to others. We are contagious. If we grumble and complain then that is passed on to others. Someone says "How are you?" You respond with a litany of complaints, and that stirs them to do the same.

On the other hand: "How are you?" You respond positively by giving God glory and saying, I am well thank you. God is in control of my life and I am doing just fine. Your smile, your positive attitude will be contagious and will at least cause that person to consider what you said.

***Seven times a day I praise You,  
Because of Your righteous ordinances.***

Try it this week. Stop complaining and thank God throughout the day for all HE does, and for who He is.

Amen.

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All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.