

Thanksgiving 2020

Pastor James Foley – Shared Sunday, November 22, 2020

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 1

The holiday season is upon us. I know because radio stations have been playing Christmas music for some time! According to my calendar Thanksgiving is this week (i.e., Thursday). That being said, I thought it would be of benefit to touch upon the theme of “giving thanks” this morning.

FYI 1 – Historians trace the roots of our national holiday to the times of the pilgrims. In 1621, Governor William Bradford of the Plymouth Colony of Massachusetts appointed a day of feasting and thanksgiving. This special feast was shared between the early settlers and the Native Americans of our region.

FYI 2 – The Governor made the following proclamation in 1623...

QUOTE – "Inasmuch as the great Father has given us this year an abundant harvest of Indian corn, wheat, peas, beans, squashes, and garden vegetables, and has made the forests to abound with game and the sea with fish and clams, and inasmuch as He has protected us from the ravages of the savages, has spared us from pestilence and disease, has granted us freedom to worship God according to the dictates of our own conscience. Now I, your magistrate, do proclaim that all you Pilgrims, with your wives and your little ones, do gather at the meeting house, on the hill, between the hours of 9 and 12 in the daytime, on Thursday, November 29th, of the year of our Lord one thousand six hundred and twenty-three and the third year since you Pilgrims landed on Pilgrim Rock, there to listen to your pastor and render thanksgiving to Almighty God for all His blessings."

FYI 3 – The American people loosely kept annual days of feasting and thanksgiving as time passed—i.e., days of reflection and recognition of God’s goodness. However, the holiday of Thanksgiving was formally established upon the recommendation of both Houses of Congress and by the authorization of President George Washington in 1779. The following proclamation was shared by Washington in that year...

QUOTE – “Whereas, it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor; Whereas, both the houses of Congress have, by their joint committee, requested me ‘to recommend to the people of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer, to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God, especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness!’

Now therefore, I do recommend next, to be devoted by the people of the states to the service of that great and glorious being, who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be, that we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection of the people of this country.”

NOTE 4 – With these words of executive power, the Thanksgiving holiday—i.e., a day to offer thanks unto God—was legally sanctioned and established, having now continued for some 241 years! I am grateful that our forefathers had the desire to dedicate a day to giving thanks to the Lord (who is most worthy)!

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 2

KEY 1 – Of course, it would be foolish of you and me (i.e., as disciples of Christ) to believe that Thanksgiving is the only day wherein it is fitting and right to offer thanks to God. Our gratitude should not and must not be limited in such a way! Rather, a spirit of thankfulness should permeate/pervade each and every day of our lives in Christ...

Q. When will we learn that it is not how we treat God on holidays that matters, but how we treat Him daily?

KEY 2 – God desires that we celebrate “thanksgiving” every day (i.e., that our lives might abound with expressions of gratitude, the showing of appreciation, and the recognition of the One who has shown such magnificent generosity).

KEY 3 – This principle is evidenced in Scripture (i.e., 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18)...

TO THE WORD

Consider the following passage (penned by the apostle Paul to the ancient church at Thessalonica)...

1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 (NIV)

16 Rejoice always, 17 pray continually, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

NOTE – Many people wonder what the will of God is for their lives. I understand this impulse, as we all want to play the part that we have been uniquely created to play. However, we do well to consider that this text identifies God’s will for each of us (i.e., macro-level). We should be a people dedicated to praise, prayer and the giving of thanks “in all circumstances.”

KEY – Thus, there is no circumstance, happening, event or season wherein we are not to give thanks!

DELVING DEEPER PT. 1

Of course, there is a part of us that hears this and wonders: “Really?” There may even be part of us that would like to erase such a passage from the biblical record, as it sounds impossible to achieve or even cruel to consider in the midst of affliction.

Q. Who naturally wants to “give thanks” in challenging times?

NOTE – We may well wonder...

Q. Did Paul misspeak or set an unrealistic standard herein?

A. No. Paul did not misspeak, as He was inspired by the Spirit of God (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16–17). He was also not setting a standard for believers that he did not effectively pursue or demonstrate in Christ. You see, “praise, prayer and thanksgiving” were Spirit-empowered hallmarks of his life—even in the midst of the most extreme of circumstances...

KEY 1 – Remember that this was a man well-acquainted with hardship, suffering and affliction...

2 Corinthians 11:23–28 (Contrasting Himself w/ False Apostles & Adversaries)

23 . . . I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. 24 Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, 26 I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. 27 I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. 28 Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.

KEY 2 – When Paul said to “give thanks in all circumstances” he knew exactly what he was saying to us all!

SO...

Q. How can we attain such a standard?

Q. How can we learn to offer thanks “in all circumstances”?

Q. How can we learn to express such gratitude even in the midst of 2020?

Great questions! I am so glad that you asked...

DELVING DEEPER PT. 2

Allow me to pose the following Q...

Q. What are you most thankful for (i.e., in your heart of hearts)?

NOTE 1 – If I were to ask most people this Q I would expect to hear A’s like the following: a) health; b) family; c) friends; d) job and/or career; e) possessions (e.g., home, car, etc.); f) freedom, g) good looks, etc. And each of these things are good and fine in their place and should be cause for genuine thanksgiving!

NOTE 2 – But there is an inherent problem in making such things the “foundation or source” for a thankful heart. Namely, they are temporary, fleeting, and transient (elaborate). Thus, when they are removed and/or threatened, your spirit of thanksgiving wanes, as it was always based upon things inherently subject to expiration or loss...

Q. How many people entered 2020 with genuine gratitude, but it declined when _____ failed?

KEY – We will never be able to fulfill the biblical mandate to “give thanks in all circumstances” if what we are most thankful for is so passing and/or subject to change! If you want to walk in a spirit of gratitude that transcends circumstance, you will need to connect your praise to something that transcends earthly circumstance...

Q. And what might that be?

A. I would ask you to consider the following...

DELVING DEEPER PT. 3

Psalm 100

- 1 Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.
- 2 Worship the Lord with gladness;
 come before him with joyful songs.
- 3 Know that the Lord is God.
 It is he who made us, and we are his;
 we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.
- 4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving
 and his courts with praise;
 give thanks to him and praise his name.
- 5 For the Lord is good and his love endures forever;
 his faithfulness continues through all generations.

NOTE – I want to emphasize v. 4–5 in this text (i.e., our answers lie within)...

Psalm 100:4–5 (Emphasis Mine)

- 4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving
 and his courts with praise;
 give thanks to him and praise his name.
- 5 **For** [i.e., Because] the Lord is good and his love endures forever;
 his faithfulness continues through all generations.

NOTE 2 – Give thanks to the Lord! Why...

- 1) **For He is Good**
- 2) **For His Love Endures Forever**
- 3) **For His Faithfulness Continues Unceasingly**

KEY – Let us take a the time to analyze these three realities (albeit briefly)...

HE IS GOOD PT. 1

NOTE – The psalmist notes that we should be thankful “for the Lord is good” (Psalm 100:5a)...

Q. What does this mean? What does it mean that God is “good”?

A. It means that His posture toward us is one of “favor, kindness and benevolence.”

Q. How many will testify to the goodness of God in your personal life and living?

Q. How many will testify He has acted kindly to you (e.g., salvation, provision, A’d prayer, etc.)?

Q. How many will attest that He was kind to you even before you came to salvation or knew Him as Savior?

Q. Why has the Lord done such things on our behalf?

A. Because the Lord is good – i.e., it is His nature to bless!

HE IS GOOD PT. 2

You may be saying to yourself, "How can God be considered good in light of the things I have been through? You don't know what it has been like to be me!" You are correct. I do not know what it is like to be you. But I do know that short-term suffering does not blot out the enduring goodness and grace of God...

KEY – You see, God is "good" when you are on the mountaintop and He is good in the valley. God is good when He leads you beside still waters or makes you lie down in green pastures and when He leads you through the valley of the shadow of death (cf. Ps. 23). It is something that is fixed and settled. There is, therefore, no time wherein God is NOT good! Christian...

NOTE 1 – We have every reason to trust He is good (even when life is hard). Even then He is doing a good work...

Romans 8:28

28 . . . We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

NOTE 2 – Let us remember that present nature of our "good" God (i.e., even when we feel/sense Him the least)...

One night a man had a dream.
 He dreamed he was walking along the beach with the LORD.
 Across the sky flashed scenes from his life.
 For each scene he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand:
 one belonging to him, and the other to the LORD.
 When the last scene of his life flashed before him,
 he looked back at the footprints in the sand.
 He noticed that many times along the path of
 his life there was only one set of footprints.
 He also noticed that it happened at the very
 lowest and saddest times in his life.

This really bothered him, and he questioned the LORD about it:
 "LORD, you said that once I decided to follow you,
 you'd walk with me all the way.
 But I have noticed that during the most
 troublesome times in my life,
 there is only one set of footprints.
 I don't understand why when
 I needed you most you would leave me."

The LORD replied:
 "My son, my precious child,
 I love you and I would never leave you.
 During your times of trial and suffering,
 when you see only one set of footprints,
 it was then that I carried you."

KEY – We can be thankful in all circumstances because no matter the circumstance God is good!

HIS LOVE ENDURES FOREVER

NOTE – The psalmist notes that we should be thankful “for God’s love endures forever” (Psalm 100:5a)...

Psalm 100:4–5a (Emphasis Mine)

4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving
and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and praise his name.

5 For the Lord is good and **his love endures forever** . . .

FYI – Much could be said concerning the love of God. We might spend the whole of eternity analyzing this topic and never plumb its depths! I will note, however, that there is an immensity and a dimensionality to the love of God...

Ephesians 3:17b–19

17 . . . And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Q. What does this sense of “immense dimensionality” speak to?

- It is so high that it is greater than the most notable and noble among us
- It is so deep that it reaches the most sinful, wayward and broken among us
- It is so wide that He loves each of us perfectly/completely (w/out exception)
- It is so long that it endures throughout time and eternity (endures forever)

KEY – You will never be able to fully grasp the love of God, but it is something that you can personally know and experience. There is nothing more transformative than “knowing” His love! And since His love is beyond all circumstance, event and contestation—i.e., never waning—you will always have a reason to give thanks to the Lord...

Romans 8:31–39

31 What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? 33 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. 34 Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36 As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

KEY – We can be thankful in all circumstances because no matter the circumstance God loves us!

HIS FAITHFULNESS CONTINUES

NOTE – Lastly, the psalmist notes we should be thankful “for His faithfulness continues” forever (Ps. 100:5c)...

Psalm 100:4–5 (Emphasis Mine)

4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving
and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and praise his name.

5 For the Lord is good and his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues through all generations.

Q. What is faithfulness? What does it mean that God is “faithful”?

A. It means that God is reliable, dependable, trustworthy, steadfast, constant, loyal and true.

Q. Who wants someone in your life that perfectly exhibits such characteristics? You have One in Him!

FYI 1 – In a world riddled with uncertainty and unreliability, He is “unchangingly and unwaveringly” faithful...

Hebrews 13:5 (cf. Deut. 31:6)

“Never will I leave you;
never will I forsake you.”

Lamentations 3:22–23

22 Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail.

23 They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.

FYI 2 – Because God is faithful, we can rest assured that He shall keep His Word! Remember that a promise is only as good as the person making it. If the person is untrustworthy (i.e., unfaithful), so is their promise. But the promise of a faithful person can be trusted! That being said, remember...

Numbers 23:19

19 God is not human, that he should lie,
not a human being, that he should change his mind.

Does he speak and then not act?

Does he promise and not fulfill?

KEY – We can be thankful in all circumstances because no matter the circumstance God is faithful!

SUMMATIONS

Q. Do you want to cultivate a life of thanksgiving that transcends earthly circumstance/event?

A. Then look to the One who “transcends” circumstance and find “in Him” your reason for praise!

Psalm 100:4–5

4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving
and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and praise his name.

5 For the Lord is good and his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues through all generations.

CONCLUSION PT. 1

KEY – Thank you for taking the time to join us today. Should those of you who have joined us online wish to give, please do so through the giving portal of our church WEBSITE (www.NewLifeBarre.org). For those who are present, you may place your donation in the OFFERING BOXES in this Sanctuary.

CONCLUSION PT. 2

As we close, allow me to note that today is OCC Sunday. Each year our church participates in Operation Christmas Child (i.e., a ministry of Samaritan’s Purse), wherein we pack shoeboxes full of gift items for children all around the world. Each shoebox provides us with the opportunity to demonstrate the love of God and communicate the Gospel, as each will include the Good News of Jesus Christ!

KEY 1 – I am thankful that we can serve the Lord in this way and bless children throughout the nations...

KEY 2 – I am thankful for the work of this church (i.e., individually and collectively) in participating in OCC...

- Thank you to those who packed shoeboxes
- Thank you to those who gave \$\$\$ unto this project
- Thank you to those who have committed OCC to prayer
- Thank you to Ruth who labored to make OCC 2020 possible

Q. Can we take a moment to PRAY for these shoeboxes as we dismiss?

Numbers 6:24–26

24 The Lord bless you
and keep you;

25 the Lord make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;

26 the Lord turn his face toward you
and give you peace.