

John 11:38-41

“Being Thankful Even When Things Stink”

1. THE TROUBLES THAT DIMINISH OUR THANKFULNESS

- A. Feelings that distress us
- B. Friends that disappoint us
- C. Foes that discredit us

2. THE TRUTH THAT DEMANDS OUR THANKFULNESS

- A. The relationship we have with our Father
- B. The resource we have in our Father

3. THE TRUST THAT DEVELOPS OUR THANKFULNESS

- A. In the promise of God’s Word
- B. In the prospect of God’s work

1. Gerta Weissman was among the thousands of prisoners held in one of Nazi Germany’s death camps during World War II.

2. She tells of how she and her fellow prisoners were forced to stand in line for hours on end, on the verge of collapsing from starvation and fatigue.

3. On one particular day, they noticed that in the corner of their grey, dull, lifeless prison, a small flower had managed to break through the concrete.

4. She said that the thousands of women in that camp took the greatest care of that little flower. It was the only spot of beauty in their ugly and deadly world, and they were thankful for it.

5. Though life may at times be filled with nothing but darkness, depression, death, and decay, there is inevitably a bloom of something for which to be thankful.

6. In John 11, the village of Bethany was reeling from the death of Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, and a prominent resident of that town.

7. The funeral was over, but a dark cloud of mourning still hung over the place. The wound of loss was still fresh, and hearts had not healed.

8. Then, a friend of the family, and a visitor whom everyone felt had arrived far too late, came to the tear-filled town. His name was Jesus.

9. Standing in front of the grave of Lazarus, Jesus uttered a word that probably had not been spoken since the brother had died. In verse 41, He said, “*Father, I thank thee...*”

10. Though Martha had warned Jesus that her brother’s body would surely stink from decomposition, in the presence of the stench of death, Jesus still offered thanks.

11. In this passage, our Lord teaches us how we can obey the command of I Thessalonians 5:18, *"In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."*

12. Notice with me some truths that Jesus teaches us about how we can give thanks, even in the most difficult of circumstances. Notice first of all, He teaches us in this text about:

I. THE TROUBLES THAT DIMINISH OUR THANKFULNESS

1. As if the death of Lazarus was not enough, in the context of our Lord's thanksgiving prayer, there were all sorts of factors that could have resisted and removed His thankfulness.

2. All around us there are elements and experiences that if we allow them, they will rob us of our gratitude, and keep us from being thankful.

3. Look with me at a few of the troubles that we see in this text that could possibly diminish the thankfulness of your heart. First of all, thankfulness could be threatened by:

A. Feelings that distress you

1. There is some interesting language used to describe the emotional state of Jesus after he arrived in Bethany.

2. Look at verse 33. It says, *"When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled."*

3. In verse 38, we read, *"Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave..."* Mark that phrase "groaning in himself".

4. The word translated "groaning" is a word that speaks of being deeply agitated by something, even to the point of being angry.

5. In verse 33, the word "troubled" speaks of stirring or agitating the waters. The picture here is of Jesus being emotionally stirred by the situation.

6. Is it not true that when you are stirred up over a situation and agitated by a circumstance you are less likely to think about being thankful?

7. Notice not only that thankfulness is threatened by *feelings that distress you*, but notice also that it is threatened by:

B. Friends that disappoint you

1. When Jesus finally arrived in Bethany, two of his dearest friends, Mary and Martha, met Him with a less than encouraging word.
2. In verses 21, and 32, they both in turn said, *“Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.”*
3. Essentially, these two sisters laid the blame for the brother’s death at the feet of Jesus. What a disappointment that must have been!
4. How painful it is when our friends turn on us, and act in ways that break our hearts! When those you love disappoint you, it is difficult to be thankful!
5. Notice not only that gratitude can be diminished by *feelings that distress you*, and *friends that disappoint you*, but notice also that our thankfulness can be threatened by:

C. Foes that discredit you

1. As if Mary and Martha’s hurtful and unbelieving words were not enough, the Jews chimed in and said in verse 37, *“Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?”*
2. In spite of the miraculous power and meticulous perfection that had marked all of Jesus’ life, there were still those who wanted to discredit Him, and seized upon any perceived opportunity to do so.
3. When your enemies are assaulting your character, and attacking your credibility, it is much easier to be vengeful than thankful.
4. Yet, we find Jesus, in the midst of all these troubles uttering a prayer of thanks to God. His gratitude was not diminished by his circumstances.
5. An old preacher named Tom Malone once asked a fellow, “How are you getting along?” The man answered, “Pretty good, under the circumstances.” Dr. Malone quickly asked, “What are you doing under there?”ⁱ
6. Though we can often get under our circumstances, Jesus reminds us that we should never get so far down that we cannot be thankful.
7. Notice a second truth we draw from this text about giving thanks. Notice not only *the troubles that diminish our thankfulness*, but notice also:

II. THE TRUTH THAT DEMANDS OUR THANKFULNESS

1. For those of who know the Lord, there are certain unchanging and unailing truths that will always call for thankfulness in our lives.
2. Jesus didn't thank the sisters, or the critics. He did however thank His Father. In so doing, He reminds us that the truth of who God is will always be sufficient reason to give thanks.
3. Notice a couple of aspects of this truth that demands our thankfulness. Notice first of all that regardless of our circumstances, we can be thankful for:

A. The relationship we have with our Father

1. Look again at verse 41. Jesus said, *"Father, I thank thee..."* Jesus referred to the God of heaven as His Father.
2. But, this relationship was not limited only to Jesus, as the only begotten Son of God. In Matthew 6:9, Jesus taught his disciples to pray by saying, *"After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven..."*
3. If you have trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior, and have been born again by His grace, the Bible says that you have become a son or daughter of God.
4. You have the unique privilege of calling the Creator of the Cosmos your Father. Through the adoption that took place at your salvation, you can call Him "Abba, Father."
5. Last week, a 30 year-old Newnan, GA woman was united with her father whom she had basically never met. Her dad lived in Kansas, and they had been searching for each other for a number of years.
6. Not long ago, Scott Becker set up a website called aprilbecker.com. When his daughter April, "googled" the phrase "Scott Robert Becker looking for April", she was directed to the site, where she read these words:

"Dear April, when you read these words, please email me. I'm your dad, and I would really like to talk to you. When I get your email, I will ask you some questions that only you would know...By the way, you have a little sister that really wants to talk to you."
7. After confirming that April was really his daughter, the two met last week for the first time.ⁱⁱ
8. Regardless of what is going on around us, we can always be thankful that one day we heard about a Father who loved us, and longed to meet us.

9. Our relationship with God demands our thankfulness, no matter what else may be true in our lives. Notice not only we should be thankful for the relationship we have with our Father, but also because of:

B. The resource we have in our Father

1. That day in the Bethany cemetery, Jesus was surrounded with skeptics and critics.
2. His own friends had lost faith in Him, and no one seemed to think He could do anything to help the situation.
3. And yet Jesus could lift his eyes to heaven and confidently pray, *“Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me.”*
4. When it seems there is no one to trust, and no where to turn, we can be thankful that we have the unfailing resource of our Father.
5. He is never too busy to talk, never too tired to listen, never too distant to hear. When no one else is available, He is ever dependable.
6. You’ll never have to stand in line, schedule an appointment, or be put on hold when you turn to your Father.
7. He has no waiting room, takes no holidays, and works all shifts. He is an inexhaustible resource for those who put their trust in Him.
8. It would be easier to empty the ocean with a straw than to empty your Father of His goodness and mercy. He is a resource for which we must ever be thankful!
9. Notice a third truth that Jesus teaches us in this text about being thankful, even in difficult situations. Notice not only *the troubles that diminish our thankfulness*, and *the truth that demands our thankfulness*, but notice also lastly:

III. THE TRUST THAT DEVELOPS OUR THANKFULNESS

1. As I mentioned in the introduction, in I Thessalonians 5:18, we find a specific command regarding the will of God for all of our lives.
2. There Paul says, *“In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”*
3. In every situation of life, whether good or bad, pleasing or painful, blessing or burden, it is God’s will that we give thanks.

4. How do we do this? How can we develop the grace of gratitude in even the most difficult of life's days? Again, I think Jesus points us to this truth in John 11.

5. This kind of unconditional gratitude comes from a deep-seated trust in God. Notice in the prayer of our Lord in verse 41. Notice first of all, that this trust is a:

A. Trust in the promise of God's Word

1. Jesus lifts His eyes above the skeptical stares of those around Him, and prays, *"Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me."*

2. You say, "Sure He prayed like that. He is the Son of God – God in the flesh. I can't pray with that kind of confidence."

3. You can, if you trust in the promises of God's Word. In Jeremiah 33:3, God says, *"Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."*

4. In John 15:7, Jesus said, *"If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."*

5. I John 5:15 assures that, *"...if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him."*

6. You too can pray with the grateful confidence, regardless of the situation around you, when you trust in the promise that God hears and answers prayer.

7. There are a couple of people in my life whom I dearly appreciate, simply because I know that if I ever need them, night or day, if I call, they will help me.

8. I may never need to call them. However, knowing that I can call makes me appreciate them.

9. You can develop an unconditional appreciation for God by trusting in the promise of His response.

10. Notice something else about this trust that develops thanks. Jesus teaches us not only to trust in the promise of God's Word, but also to:

B. Trust in the prospect of God's work

1. Don't miss this. While Jesus is thanking God, Lazarus is still dead. He will not be for long, but at the moment this prayer of thanks is offered, his body is still cold and lifeless.

2. Jesus is thanking God even before His prayer has actually been answered.

3. It may be that right now, you don't seem to have very much for which to be thankful. You may look around, and see nothing but deadness and coldness in your life.

4. Jesus teaches us in this text to thank God anyway, being grateful for the prospect of what He is going to do!

5. Your family may not all be saved this Thanksgiving, but if you are trusting God on their behalf, you can go ahead and thank Him for the day in which they are *going* to be saved.

6. Your needs may not all be met as you come to this season for thankfulness, but you can be thankful nonetheless, believing and looking forward to the day when God shall supply all of your needs according to His riches in glory.

7. We can thank God already, trusting in the prospect of the work He is going to do!

8. With the rise of text messages, it seems that a whole new language of acronyms and abbreviations has entered into our vocabulary.

9. For instance, most anybody under the age 40 understands that the letters "l.o.l" doesn't spell the word "lol".

10. I have an acronym for this thanksgiving season. It is TIA. That is short for "Thanks in advance."

11. We may not have seen Lazarus get up yet, but we can still thank God in advance for what He is going to do.

1. The death of Lazarus was a tragic scene. Mary, Martha, and the mourners could only see reasons for grief, not gratitude.

2. Yet when Jesus had them move the stone from the tomb, not even the stink of death was enough to overcome His thankfulness to the Father.

3. Whatever heartaches and hardships threaten to overshadow your Thanksgiving, I pray you will be reminded by our precious Savior that you can be thankful even when things stink.

4. Lift your eyes up to the Father, and thank Him regardless of what is going on around you.

www.standandspeak.org

ⁱ Hutson, Curtis, Great Preaching on Thanksgiving, (Sword of the Lord Publishers, Murfreesboro, 1987), p. 15

ⁱⁱ Father reunites with daughter after 30 year search, 11/11/09, *AFP*, accessed 11/20/09, <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5iDmsi8IwKwrkUorb6PTV1bAyOghw>

Terry Trivette 2009