

Title: Thanksgiving
Text: Various
Date: 5 February, 2012
Preacher: Rev Stu Cameron

We are in our third week of a month long series exploring four different modes of prayer: Adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication. We began by discovering that:

Adoration is bowing before the beauty of God.

Then last week we named that:

Confession is bowing before the holiness of God.

This week we turn to thanksgiving. The Bible says that thanksgiving should never be far from our lips:

Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything.
(Ephesians 5:19-20)

There is so much here at Newlife we can be thankful to God for. We could spend the rest of this service expressing gratitude to God for what he is doing in our midst.

For example, I am so thankful for the way in which God has been enlarging our vision to include mission to the nations – countries like Cambodia, Thailand, the Solomon Islands and Bosnia. What a privilege.

I am thankful for the way God is stretching us in mission to our city. Over the last year we have seen one miracle of provision after another in establishing Newlife – Pacific Pines. And every week without exception God has brought new people to Pac Pines. Last week there were 13 first time visitors. Praise God!

I am thankful that God is growing our family numerically. Last Friday night at Youthstreet seven young people responded to a call to commitment as Mike preached his first sermon as our new youth worker. Then on Sunday night at 12two 3 more young people made the first-time decision to follow Jesus as Lord and Saviour in response to Ralph's message. Praise God! On top of this, last weekend was a record attendance for us for a 'normal' Sunday, with just under 900 people attending our Sunday services.

All of this is not to say 'How good are we?', but 'How good is God!'

This is what God is doing in and through us. But there is one reason that towers above all others as the fundamental reason why we should be devoted to God in thanksgiving. It is not what God has done and is doing through us. It is what God has done for us.

Whether we know it or have acknowledged it or not, all of us have experienced the grace of God. What I hope we will discover this morning is this:

Thanksgiving is bowing before the grace of God.

Grace is amazing. Grace is the undeserved, unmerited, unearned favour of God. Grace is the greatest of the many gifts of God given to us. God's grace is a bottom-less sea of unconditional love.

Phillip Yancey tells a story of a British conference on comparative religions where experts from around the world debated what, if any, belief was unique to the Christian faith. They began eliminating possibilities. Incarnation? Other

religions had different versions of gods appearing in human form. Resurrection? Again, other religions had accounts of return from death.

The debate went on for some time until Cambridge professor and author C.S. Lewis wandered into the room. "What's the rumpus about?" he asked, and heard in reply that his colleagues were discussing Christianity's unique contribution among world religions. Lewis responded, "Oh, that's easy. It's grace." After some discussion, everyone had to agree.

The notion of God's love coming to us free of charge, no strings attached, seems to go against every instinct of humanity. It is scandalous and it is unique. The Buddhist eight-fold path, the Hindu doctrine of Karma, the Jewish covenant, and Muslim code of law—each of these offers a way to earn approval. Only Christianity dares to speak of God's love being unconditional. This is the nature of grace.

We experience grace fully and freely through Jesus Christ. The Apostle John tells us that God's grace and truth, the unconditional, no strings attached love of God, invaded our world in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

We experience grace through Jesus.

We grow in that grace and in our thankfulness as we grow in our knowledge of and about Jesus.

And one of the best ways we grow in our knowledge of Jesus is as we read, meditate on, pray through, wrestle with and immerse ourselves in the Book that testifies to him.

It is pretty simple really: the more we read our bible the more we learn about Jesus. The more we learn about Jesus the deeper our appreciation for God's grace grows. The more we grow in our knowledge of God's grace, the more we will overflow with gratitude, thanks and praise to God.

Thanksgiving is bowing before the grace of God.

An RE teacher was teaching a class in a primary school. She began by asking, 'Who knocked down the walls of Jericho?' There was a long silence as the children shuffled nervously on their seats. Eventually, a little boy put up his hand and said, 'Please miss, my name is Craig Hindman. I don't know who did it, but it wasn't me!'

The teacher though the reply was very cheeky, so she reported the incident to the headmaster. After a pause the headmaster replied, 'I know Craig Hindman; he's an honest boy. If he said he didn't do it, he didn't do it.'

By now the teacher was exasperated. The headmaster was either very rude or ignorant. So the teacher wrote to the Department of Education to complain, and received this response:

'Dear Madam, We are sorry to hear about the walls of Jericho and that nobody has admitted causing the damage. If you send us an estimate we will see what we can do about the cost.'

It's a funny story that illustrates a serious point; the bible is a rich resource, a treasure that too many people are unaware or ignorant of. Tragically, even in the church too many of us are unaware and ignorant of the words of life that this book contains the Word of life testifies too.

The grace of God bleeds through every page of the Bible.

The Bible is one Book made up of a collection of sixty six different books written by more than forty different human authors over the span of more than one thousand years

We can call the Bible one book because first we believe it has one Author. The 66 different books reflect the personality of their human authors and the times in which they lived, but each of these books hold together as a unity because each

and every human author was inspired by God himself to write and record all they did. Paul said this to his student Timothy:

All scripture is God breathed.
(2 Timothy 3:16)

The Bible is one Book with one author and it has one supreme, overarching subject that binds it all together; Jesus Christ. This includes both the Old and New Testaments. In John's gospel, Jesus says this of what we know today as the Old Testament:

These are the scriptures that testify about me.
(John 5:39)

From Genesis to Revelation the bible points to and testifies to Jesus. The Old Testament points to the promise of Jesus. The New Testament testifies to the truth of that promise.

The Bible is one book, with one author, with one supreme subject and with one overarching theme – the redemptive grace of God.

The amazing grace of God is the thread that runs through every one of the sixty six books of the Bible and ties them altogether. In the story of grace we see that God has held nothing back in launching a rescue mission to save, redeem and restore humanity. History is God's story - His-story – of graciously redeeming a lost and broken humanity.

Grace is a diamond with many facets. No matter how many ways we look at grace, no matter how many times we reflect on it, grace will always amaze us.

Grace is the theme that bleeds through every page of the Bible.

God's Grace Rescues

In Genesis God's rescues Jacob's sons and their families from death through famine, even though they do not deserve to be saved, as their estranged brother Joseph becomes their unexpected savior.

God's Grace Provides

In Exodus, God's Grace Provides as God rains down from heaven manna to feed a whining, whining multitude of Israelites in the desert, even though they do not deserve it.

God's Grace Forgives

In Leviticus, God's grace forgives as God institutes the Day of Atonements provisions where the sins of the people are atoned, or paid for through the sacrifice made by the High Priest on one, high, holy day.

God's Grace Speaks

In Numbers, God's grace speaks as God tabernacles or lives amongst the people as they wander in the wilderness, speaking daily to them through Moses in the Tent of Meeting. (2:17)

God's Grace Initiates

In Deuteronomy God's grace initiates as God who renews the covenant he has made with Israel. (30:10)

God's Grace is Unearned

In Joshua God's grace is unearned, as God reminds the Israelites who now inhabit the Promised Land:

I gave you a land on which you did not toil and cities you did not build; and you live in them and eat from vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant.
(Joshua 24:13)

Grace bleeds through every page of the bible.

God's Grace Perseveres

In Judges, God's Grace is love that perseveres. Time and again Israel turns their back on God and rebels; and time and again God forgives and restores. God's grace never, ever gives up!

God's Grace Redeems

In Ruth, God's grace redeems as in the beautiful story of Ruth and Boaz we glimpse the love and grace of God that redeems, or buys back our freedom and safety.

God's Grace Surprises

In 1 Samuel, God's grace surprises. David is the smallest and youngest of Jesse's sons and yet it was David who God anointed as king. David did not choose God; God chose David.

God's Grace Cleanses

In 2 Samuel, God's grace cleanses. David fails spectacularly in committing adultery with Bathsheba and murdering her husband Uriah. David lives with the consequences of his sin, but not with his guilt. In his shame David cries out:

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
(Psalm 51:10)

Grace bleeds through every page of the bible.

God's Grace Astonishes

In 1 Kings, God's grace astonishes. The prophet Elijah calls down fire from heaven to consume his sacrifice, and then rain from heaven to saturate a drought-stricken land for a people who did not deserve it.

God's Grace Purifies

In 2 Kings, God's grace purifies as Elisha heals Naaman of the affliction and shame caused by leprosy.

God's Grace is Gift

In 1 Chronicles, God's grace is a gift. Towards the very end of his life, King David calls the people to give to the building of the temple:

But who am I, who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.
(1 Chronicles 29:14)

Grace bleeds through every page of the bible.

God's Grace Knows

In 2 Chronicles, God's grace knows, in particular God's grace knows and responds to our capacity to sin. At the high point of the dedication of David and Solomon's temple, when all the people have their heart turned to God, God says to them through Solomon:

If my people, who are called my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their hand.
(2 Chronicles 7:14)

Grace bleeds through every page of the bible.

God's Grace Restores

In Ezra and Nehemiah, God's grace restores the broken walls of Jerusalem, the forgotten word of God and the temple.

God's Grace is Providential

In Esther, God's grace is providential. God's grace is always perfect in timing. God's grace makes a way where there is no other way as Esther is made queen for 'such a time as this.'

God's Grace is Powerful

In Job, God's grace is powerful. Even in the depth of suffering and pain, Job's story reassures us that God's grace is always present.

God's Grace Overflows

In Psalms, Grace overflows. David reminds us that our cup always overflows with the love, mercy and grace of God.

God's Grace Teaches

In Proverbs, Grace teaches us wisdom that matures us.

God's Grace is Life

In Ecclesiastes, God's grace is life as Solomon soberly reminds us that life apart from the grace of God is meaningless.

God's Grace is Passionate

In Song of Songs, God's grace loves – passionately loves. In the heartfelt poetry of one lover to another we are reassured that God in his grace is the passionate lover of our souls.

God's Grace Renews

In Isaiah, God's grace renews the faint of heart:

God gives strength to the wary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not grow faint.
(Isaiah 40:29-31)

Grace bleeds through every page of the bible.

God's Grace Rebuilds

In Jeremiah, God's grace rebuilds broken lives as God promises that Jerusalem's shame will be reversed.

God's Grace is Merciful

In Lamentations, God's grace is full of mercy, as amidst cries of brokenness and despair, Jeremiah was able to pray:

Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his mercies never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.
(Lamentations 3:22-23)

Grace bleeds through every page of the bible.

God's Grace Refreshes

In Ezekiel God's grace is a refreshing river that flows from the very throne room of God; a river we cannot cross, and which brings life wherever it flows.

God's Grace Protects

In Daniel, God's grace protects Daniel and his friends from roaring lions and a red-hot furnace.

God's Grace Suffers

In Hosea, God's grace suffers as Israel prostitutes herself to foreign gods.

God's Grace is Indiscriminate

In Joel, God's grace is indiscriminate as God promises to pour out his Spirit on all flesh; young and old, men and women.

God's Grace Convicts

In Amos, God's grace convicts Israel of her sin and unrepentant heart.

God's grace Delivers

In Obadiah, God's grace delivers people exiled by their sin back home.

God's Grace Seeks

In Jonah, God's grace seeks out the lost Ninevites and the hard-hearted Jonah.

God's Grace Shocks

In Micah, God's grace shocks as the prophet speaks of a day coming soon when lowly Bethlehem will be exalted:

But you, Bethlehem...though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel.

(Micah 5:2)

Grace bleeds through every page of the bible.

God's Grace is Patient

In Nahum, God's grace is patient; slow to anger and great in power.

God's Grace Enlivens

In Habakkuk, God's Grace Enlivens:

Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the stalls, yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my saviour.

(Habakkuk 3:17-18)

Grace bleeds through every page of the bible.

God's Grace Saves

In Zephaniah, God's grace has the power to save:

The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save.

(Zephaniah: 3:17)

Grace bleeds through every page of the bible.

God's Grace is Ever-Present

In Haggai, God's grace is a promise of presence:

'I am with you', declares the Lord.

(Haggai 1:13)

Grace bleeds through every page of the bible.

God's Grace Calls

In Zechariah, God's grace calls the wayward to repentance:

'Return to me', declares the Lord Almighty, 'and I will return to you.'
(Zechariah 1:3)

Grace bleeds through every page of the bible.

God's Grace Refines

In Malachi, God's grace is a refining fire and a purifying force.

Thanksgiving is bowing before the grace of God.

Have you ever watched the program Antiques Roadshow? On this show people bring often forgotten odds and ends that have been lying around in sheds or cupboards to find out if they may possibly be valuable antiques. Tim Challies refers to a particular episode in which an elderly man from Arizona, brought in an old blanket he had inherited several years ago. Though the man knew the old blanket probably possessed a little value when it came into his possession, he had simply thrown it over the back of a rocking chair in his bedroom. It had remained on the rocking chair until the opportunity arose for him to take it to the Roadshow. This is what happened next:

With the blanket hanging on a rack behind them, the expert appraiser told the old man that his heart stopped when he first saw it. ... [The appraiser explained] that the item was a Navajo chief's blanket that had been woven in the 1840s. In wonderful condition, it was one of the oldest, intact Navajo weaves to survive to the twentieth-first century, and certainly one of only a tiny handful to exist outside of museum collections. ... Because of its rarity and significance, the appraiser had no trouble assigning a value of somewhere between \$350,000 and \$500,000. ...

As the man walked out of the convention center...the blanket he had cavalierly carried in with him was now cradled carefully in his arms. He walked out of the building with security guards on either side of him, drove straight to a bank, and placed the blanket in a safe deposit box. ...

What had been "junk," a mere accent to an old rocking chair, had been instantly transformed into a precious treasure.

Here is my point. The Bible is a treasure-trove that testifies to amazing grace. It is a diamond that shines with the many facets of God's grace. It is priceless resource that too many of us ignore or discard it like an old blanket. For God's sake, read it!

Thanksgiving is bowing before the grace of God. We experience grace fully and freely in Jesus Christ. The bible in both the Old and New Testaments points to and proclaims him. The more we read our bible, the better we get to know Jesus, the better we get to know Jesus the more we will comprehend grace – the more we comprehend grace, the more thankful we will be. Our hearts will overflow with praise and thanksgiving. We won't have to grit our teeth to pray, we will bubble over with prayer. We will never have enough words to say thank you, thank you, thank you!

The more observant of you may have recognized that I finished my run through the bible earlier with Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament. You may also be relieved to know that having tracked through the 39 books of the Old Testament; I'm not going to now work through the 27 books of the New Testament. I think we are all relieved!

But remember this; John tells us that God's grace and truth came and dwelled among us in Jesus Christ. The redemptive rescue mission of God culminates in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

It is only as we experience the grace of Jesus Christ that we can ever truly be full, freely and completely thankful.

Let me finish with three powerful stories that illustrate three powerful truths:

The grace of Jesus Christ is love that Persists

Michael Brown tells the story of a boy who was the apple of his parents' eyes. In his mid-teens, the boy's life went off the rails. He dropped out of school and began associating with a bad crowd.

One night he staggered into his house at 3:00 a.m., completely drunk. His mother slipped out of bed and left her room. The father followed, assuming that his wife was in the kitchen, perhaps crying. Instead, he found her at her son's bedside, softly stroking his matted hair as he lay passed out drunk on the covers.

"What are you doing?" the father asked.

The mother answered, "He won't let me love him when he's awake."

God does not wait for us to love him before he will love us. God's grace comes without conditions. Even knowing that many of us would continue to reject him, while we were still sinners Christ died for us, his arms outstretched with free, unconditional love.

The grace of Jesus Christ is love that Chooses

A couple of years ago on Father's Day I shared a story that Lee Strobel tells.

Shortly after the Korean War, a Korean woman had an affair with an American soldier, and she got pregnant. He went back to the United States, and she never saw him again. She gave birth to a little girl, and this little girl looked different than the other Korean children. She had light-colored, curly hair. In that culture, children of mixed race were ostracized by the community. In fact, many women would kill their children because they didn't want them to face such rejection.

But this woman didn't do that. She tried to raise her little girl as best she could. For seven years she tried to do that, until the rejection was too much. She did something that probably nobody in this room could imagine ever doing. She abandoned her little girl to the streets.

This little girl was ruthlessly taunted by people. They called her the ugliest word in the Korean language, *tookki*, alien devil. It didn't take long for this little girl to draw conclusions about herself based on the way people treated her.

For two years she lived in the streets, until finally she made her way to an orphanage. One day, word came that a couple from America was going to adopt a little boy. All the children in the orphanage got excited, because at least one little boy was going to have hope. He was going to have a family. So this little girl spent the day cleaning up the little boys—giving them baths and combing their hair—and wondering which one would be adopted by the American couple.

The next day the couple came, and this is what the girl recalled:

"It was like Goliath had come back to life. I saw the man with his huge hands lift up each and every baby. I knew he loved every one of them as if they were his own. I saw tears running down his face, and I knew if they could, they would have taken the whole lot home with them.

"He saw me out of the corner of his eye. Now let me tell you. I was nine years old, but I didn't even weigh 30 pounds. I was a scrawny thing. I had worms in my body. I had lice in my hair. I had boils all over me. I was full of scars. I was not a pretty sight. But the man came over to me, and he began rattling away something in English, and I looked up at him. Then he took this huge hand and laid it on my face. What was he saying? He was saying, 'I want this child. This is the child for me.'"

The grace of God does not choose one of us; the grace of God chooses all of us. We are all spiritual orphans who are the subject of the gracious love of God in Jesus Christ. In the cross of Christ, God shouts to the heavens, I choose them all – oh that they would choose me!

God will take nine steps toward us, but he will not take the tenth. He will incline us to repent, but he cannot do our repenting for us.

A.W. Tozer, Christian Reader, Vol. 32, no. 5.