Deeply Grateful

Last in the November series: Christian Thanksgiving

# Scripture: Psalm 147; 1 Peter 1:3-21

# Key Thought: Our gratitude deepens when we realize how blessed we really are.

# Intro: Just thankful or deeply grateful?

In getting us started this morning, I’d suggest that we draw a little contrast between what it might mean to be just ordinarily thankful as opposed to deeply grateful.

## Ordinary thanksgiving

Ordinary thanksgiving might at least mentally recognize that what we have comes from God. Ordinary thanksgiving is willing to grant that it’s rather crass not to be thankful at Thanksgiving. But did being thankful really touch our heart spiritually this week? Or did we just go through the motions of another nice holiday?

## Being deeply Grateful

I invite you this morning to join me in exploring what it might mean to be more intense about our thanksgiving; to be not just routinely thankful but deeply grateful. A deeper sense of thanksgiving comes from being more aware of the massive extent of God’s blessings. We begin to feel a humble indebtedness to the grace and sovereignty of God because we know our blessings are way beyond anything that we somehow deserve.

The deeply grateful person then acts upon his or her discoveries with worship and thanksgiving to God, with words to others that acknowledge God’s gifts, with generous acts toward those in need, and with a continuing sense of stewardship for all our blessings.

How can we be deeply grateful? How can thankfulness truly touch our hearts?

# We become deeply grateful when we reflect upon:

## The wide variety of things we have for which to be thankful.

### Things mentioned in the Psalm

To give us some ideas about the range of things we can be thankful for, look first at the many different types of blessings mentioned in Psalm 147.

* v. 2- builds Jerusalem, gathers the exiles – These were the ways God was helping the nation of Israel at the time the Psalm was written. They remind us to give thanks for the many blessing we enjoy because of the nation that we live in.
* v. 3 - heals the brokenhearted – How wonderful to thank God in this season that God comforts his people in their times of emotional distress. We certainly give thanks that God is a God of Hope and encouragement (Rom. 15:5,13).
* v. 6 sustains the humble – As the previous Psalm had said, God “gives food to the hungry” and “lifts up those who are bowed down” (Psalm 146:7, 8). How has God supplied your needs during difficult times this year?
* vv 8,9 - sun, rain, crops – Thanksgiving is always a time to thank God for the harvest too. He has so ordained our living conditions that we can grow abundant food. He has blessed us with transportation advantages so that we can enjoy food from many places other as well.
* v. 11 delights in those who fear him – Thank God he is not distant from his creatures. He has sent his Spirit to live in his people. His presence is with us.
* vv 12-14 speaks of protection for Jerusalem. God grants us protection every day and blesses us with a measure of peace. Lest we think this prayer is presumptuous, remember that Jesus taught us to pray that we would be delivered from evil. So, when we thank God for protection, we are thanking him for answering the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray.
* vv 16-18 snow and frost – well, where I am from, they call snow “poor man’s fertilizer.” But most of us just give thanks for the seasons.
* v. 19 revealed his word to Israel – Even before the OT was complete, or the NT was written, the Psalmist had a sense of how precious the gift of God’s Word was to God’s people. We who also have the NT and have the Bible available to us in so many ways and enjoy the freedom to access it anytime should be even more thankful for it.

I’m sure this list is not exhaustive, but does this seem like a long list? It is intended to be, because it is as we begin to see the multiplicity of God’s blessings, the overwhelming scope of our indebtedness, that we become so much more deeply grateful.

### Our many-faceted personal blessings lists

If meditating with the Psalmist did not spark your gratitude, then I suggest making your own multi-faceted list. What kinds of categories are on it?

* country
* health
* heritage of faith and freedom
* food, shelter, etc.
* work, ability to work
* family, relationships
* family heritage
* deliverances
* healings
* pets
* hobbies, toys
* special blessings

Surely, as we think about the overwhelming breadth of our lists, we become deeply grateful to God for all that he has given us.

## The abundance of our blessings compared to so many others in our world.

Another line of thought that cannot help but result in profound thanksgiving for us is when we compare what we enjoy with the struggles of so many in our world. We have only to check out the news to understand that in many places there is war, political instability, or outright persecution of believers. In other countries such as Venezuela, there is economic disruption.

I remember one of the things that shocked me when I visited Zambia in 1999 was being told that the life expectancy there was in the thirties due to the AIDS epidemic. The Website I checked as I was preparing this sermon listed life expectancy in Zambia in 1999 as 44 years old. By 2016 it had recovered to 61 years old. Compare that to the life expectancy here which is in the mid-eighties.

Here is another example—Haiti. When I visited in 1999, I was told that if you had a job, 13 people on average ate at your table. The latest figures for official unemployment in Haiti are around 14%.

Consider a third example: the situation with freshwater in the world.

The American continent is the wettest continent with 46 percent of the world annual renewable freshwater resources for 30 percent of the global land area. The renewable freshwater resources per person are 55 500 litres per day. http://www.fao.org/nr/water/aquastat/didyouknow/index.stm

We take fresh water for granted, but it is one of the most precious resources in the world. If you live in Melbourne or Perth, Australia, you would not think of brushing your teeth while the tap water is flowing into the sink at the same time, something we think nothing of.

We could go on to talk about the variety of foods available in our grocery stores or about the educational opportunities in our country?

What effect should these kinds of thoughts have on us? First, they should make us more thankful. If being aware of the disparities of our world doesn’t deepen our gratitude for our blessings, then there is something wrong with us. But after that, such thinking should also help us to remember to share with others in need, not just in our country but in other countries as well.

## How undeserving we are.

Another line of thinking that deepens our gratitude is to meditate concerning the source of our blessings and the reason for them. Do we really have all this through some matching merit of our own? Do we somehow deserve it all? Consider the words of David as he collected offerings for the building of the temple.

Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor,
for everything in heaven and earth is yours.
Yours, Lord, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all.
 Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things.
In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all.
Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name.

 “But who am I, and 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 Chron 29:11-15 NIV

There is a clear sense of humility in what David says. Even though he was a king and had won many military victories on his way to that day, he was humbly aware that without the enabling of God, the blessing of God, the calling of God, his good fortune would not have happened.

I’m afraid that one reason we are not more deeply grateful is that we naively reserve too much credit to ourselves for the blessings that we enjoy. Even though we may have worked hard; even though we may have used our skill and talent well; even though we may have created some of our own good breaks; who allotted us those abilities? Who so ordained that we should be born into the circumstances where we had those opportunities? Who prevented us from untold disasters? When we stop to think about it, our thanksgiving becomes much greater, much deeper. While we may have contributed to the blessings we have, we cannot take credit for them. Ultimately, they must be considered as gifts from God. In Psalm 147:1 the Psalmist suggests that we meditate on “how…fitting it is to praise him” who is the source of all good gifts. As James put it,

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. James 1:17 NIV

When we think about this, our gratitude deepens immensely.

## The rich blessings of salvation.

This year we are especially seeking to reflect concerning what makes our thanksgiving holiday uniquely Christian. This is the reason I had us read from 1 Peter chapter 1:3-21. It contains a great list of blessing that come to us because of our salvation in Jesus Christ. Peter is encouraging the church by enumerating some of the great benefits that are ours in Christ. Here is the rich list I compiled just from this passage.

### Benefits that are ours in Christ from 1 Peter 1:3-21

* New birth – our lives made new through Jesus. A spiritual beginning. This birth signifies that we are a part of the family of God.
* Living Hope – Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we expect to live also.
* Inheritance kept in heaven - Just being in that place of God’s presence will be a huge blessing, but there will be rewards for our service as well. We have heavenly treasure waiting.
* Shielded by God’s power through faith – In this world we have many troubles, but God’s power is at work to help us, to protect us, to deliver us, to keep us for that day when we see Jesus.
* Salvation’s full revelation is still coming -- We always have a day to look forward to. Whatever spiritual blessings we experience now are only the down payment on what God intends to deliver to those who belong to Jesus.
* Faith that is more valuable than gold – God is developing our faith – a characteristic we find almost mystical, but that God declares to be highly valuable.
* Inexpressible joy – we have joy from God’s Spirit – overflowing joy.
* Redeemed with the precious blood of Jesus – All this comes to us because Jesus has paid the price for our salvation. It is not our doing. Salvation is a gift that comes to us at a high price which Jesus has paid on our behalf.

### Additional NT blessings

From a whole Bible standpoint, the list is certainly not complete - Think of the other fruits of the Spirit. Think of the Gifts of the Spirit. Think of the blessings of the fellowship of believers. We have whole new sets of blessings to be thankful for in Jesus. We need to be so humbly grateful, so profoundly thankful, so immensely grateful. And our Christian faith vastly deepens our thanksgiving.