

Sacrifice of Thankfulness

Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* has been a spectacular success down through history. The first movie version of the book was produced in 1938.¹ Since then there have been at least five more movies and seven cartoon versions of the story produced.² Charles Dickens' story is phenomenally popular. The important character of the book and the star of the visual versions is a miserly Mr. Scrooge who is self-centered, greedy and mean towards others. He is an example of an unloving employer toward his employees as well as others. He thought his employee was lazy and non-supportive, always wanting time-off for a silly holiday. His actions surely would have motivated most of us to quit. He was unthankful. Eventually he learned to be loving and thankful only after having three encounters with ghosts. Initially, Mr. Scrooge was only interested in what he could get for himself out of life and out of everyone around him.

Some people are like Mr. Scrooge. Oh, they are more polished and gracious in their words and behavior, but they are still ungrateful people deep down inside. They have learned how to manipulate others in a less offensive way. Are you like Mr. Scrooge? Are you greedy and unthankful towards others? Always wanting more and never satisfied with others? Such individuals are not always easy to identify. Let's be positive and try to identify some important characteristics of thankful people. Are you ready?

Consider the woman who had difficulty arriving at work one morning due to a terrible snowstorm. Amazingly, she still arrived at work on time and was thankful. Her supervisor was surprised to see her, and was equally surprised to

hear that she was thankful to make it to work in such a storm. When asked why she was so thankful, she said that she was thankful that she lived so close to work. Her supervisor still did not understand how she could even walk on the icy sidewalks with the blowing winds. She said that she was thankful that she was able to crawl to work on her hands and knees. Her supervisor was astounded and asked what was so wonderful about crawling to work on her hands and knees. The woman smiled and said, "During the blizzard in the early morning light, no one was able to see me."³

Most of us would have complained about the snow, the cold, and the hardship of getting to work. It is easy to find fault in a sinful, fallen and enormously imperfect world.



Nothing is perfect in this world in which we live, and no one is perfect either. If we just look and listen long enough, we can find some situation that we do not like about something or someone. It will just take some time. The flaws are there and the disappointment can be realized. Don't worry. It is easy

since others are not perfect. Just look. You can find something! Unfortunately, some are so skillful that they do not have to look very hard or very long. They find imperfections easily and quickly. Why? Actually, the answer is not found outside of the one doing the looking. It is actually found within. Like Mr. Scrooge they are preoccupied with themselves - unloving, ungrateful and wrapped up in themselves. Yes, there are a great many things that are truly wrong about which we can complain, but not if you are a thankful person.

GOD'S PERSPECTIVE. Therefore, we should not be surprised that God has asked us to stop complaining. Our

1. http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lesson238/movie_bib.html

2. Ibid.

3. Michael Hodgen. "Always Thankful," 1001 More Humorous Illustrations . Zondervan Publishing House. 1998. p. 324.

complaining reveals our selfishness and unthankful heart. Maybe that is why God wrote these words . . .

Rejoice always . . . 1 Thess 5:16 (NAS95S)

We need to rejoice - always!

It is one thing to recognize the presence of evil and sin in the world, but it is another to sin with our mouths by complaining and griping. Notice that God encourages us in the next passage to give thanks rather than commit sin with our mouths.

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. Eph 5:3-4 (NIV)

There are many wicked things we can do with our mouths, but one great thing we can do with it is to express our thankfulness for another person.

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Col 3:16 (NAS95S)

Have you ever wanted to do God's will? Have you ever asked God to help you His will for your life? Well, here is one aspect of His will.

. . . always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father . . . Eph 5:20 (NAS95S)

Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. Col 3:17 (NAS95S)

. . . in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 1 Thess 5:18 (NAS95S)

It is God's will that we give thanks and always. But not just in one thing or on one occasion but in everything today, tomorrow, next month and next year.

In the gospels Jesus was a great example of thankfulness. There we are told that Jesus gave thanks for food before it was to be eaten (Matt. 15:36; Luke 22:19; John 6:23). In addition, the Apostle Paul prayed giving thanks for all of the food that was about to be eaten by two hundred and seventy-six ship-bound people. This is one reason why we pray, thanking God for our food before we eat.

Having said this, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of all, and he broke it and began to eat. All of them were encouraged and they themselves also took food. All of us in the ship were two hundred and seventy-six persons. Acts 27:35-37 (NAS95S)

Paul gave thanks for people (Col 1:3; 1 Thess 1:2). He encouraged us to give thanks for fellow believers of Jesus Christ simply because they are fellow believers, if for no other reason (2 Thess 2:13).

If on occasions, you find it difficult to be thankful, remember it is our sacrifice to God.

Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. Heb 13:15 (NAS95S)

Sometimes it is a sacrifice to admit that we are dependent upon God and that He is the one who actually accomplished something in our lives. Some people do not like admitting that they are dependent on anyone. Consider this statement,

Unless the LORD builds the house,
They labor in vain who build it;
Unless the LORD guards the city,
The watchman keeps awake in vain.

Ps 127:1 (NAS95S)

It is also a sacrifice to remember and care enough to take the time to express our thankfulness.

CONCLUSION. We have wonderful reasons to be thankful. The first reason is that God loves us (John 3:16) and provides us with food, air, and water without our asking for it (Acts 14:17). We can be thankful that God is holy and righteous. He is a just God. The Psalmist said,

*I shall give thanks to You with uprightness of heart,
When I learn Your righteous judgments. Ps 119:7 (NAS95S)*

Also, God has performed wonders for us and He faithfully keeps His promises. Who do you know who keeps promises without fail? The prophet Isaiah wrote this,

*O LORD, You are my God;
I will exalt You, I will give thanks to Your name;
For You have worked wonders,
Plans formed long ago, with perfect faithfulness.
Isa 25:1 (NAS95S)*

God is kind - always.

*Give thanks to the Lord of lords,
For His lovingkindness is everlasting. Ps 136:3 (NAS95S)*

And our ultimate thanks should be because our God and Savior. Jesus Christ has given us the opportunity to have

everlasting life with Him forever. The Apostle Paul was thankful Jesus - God's wonderful and indescribable gift!

*Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift! 2 Cor 9:15
(NAS95S)*

Yes, the world is a mess, embroiled in evil, filled with wicked people - us - but we can be thankful that our God has provided a way for us to have our sins forgiven. Jesus is that way! He is the only way. By believing that Jesus is our God and trusting Him to forgive our sins, God responds by giving us a gift - everlasting life. We can be thankful for all that He has given us and all that He continues to do for us. Those who believe in Jesus Christ can be thankful for our fellow believers and even the difficult situations that we have to face day-to-day (James 1:2).

Therefore, this Thanksgiving season let us thank Him for the great bounty He has given to us. We should be like Frances Ridley Havergal. We are told that near the end of her life, Frances Ridley Havergal wrote down every day on a calendar something - often a little thing - for which she thanked God. It was her way of thinking about thanking God.⁴ She had a thankful heart - always. Truly she offered a sacrifice of thanks with her heart and pen - and most likely with her mouth.

4. Robert J. Morgan. Preacher's Sourcebook of Creative Sermon Illustrations. Thomas Nelson. 2007. p. 737.