



-- Video – A Thanksgiving Moment

Does that video remind anyone else about the manner in which people are sometimes prone to approach this season of Thanksgiving? Rather than turning our hearts to God in humble gratitude and joyful dependence, we often find ourselves tempted to turn a season meant for grateful worship into anything but that.

- Now, I want you to know, that next to my beloved wife of 10 years, my mother is the most wonderful woman in the world.
- However, I am going to tell on her this morning.
 - She wanted everything to be absolutely perfect and never wanted to let anyone down in any way
 - Thanksgiving often stressed her out.
- (Describe the typical stressful thanksgiving morning.)
 - A delightful opportunity for thanksgiving and praise often turned into something far more sinister.

If you will recall, this was very much the attitude of the people in Nazareth in the passage that we have been examining for the past three Sundays. They had an opportunity unequalled at any time in any place in all of history, yet they took God's graces for granted. They were blessed by God to see the very Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, grow up! They had the unparalleled privilege of knowing Him for thirty years and interacting with Him each and every day. However, because they came to Christ with a selfish spirit of entitlement, and because they foolishly flouted that with which they were familiar, they took God's grace for granted to the extent that they attempted to murder the Son of God who came to save them.

-- Read Luke 4:14-30; Pray

Last week we learned from this passage that, if we are to avoid the same temptations that devastated the people of Nazareth that day in the temple, then we

must never take God's graces for granted. Rather, we learned that we must always remain amazed by the Bible.

Keeping with that line of thought, our second point of application is this: Growing Christians are amazed by the church.

Before we discuss why we should always remain amazed by the church, let me first give appropriate caution. As we said last week, we do not and must never worship any of God's graces. They are not God; they are His gifts to us. We know that we succumb to idolatry whenever we worship anything other than the one triune God of the universe, and that includes the church itself. Granted, the church is the blessed institution that God has ordained as the means by which we are to gather together to worship, but we must never forget that we come together to worship Him, and Him alone. // We must never make the mistake, as many in that there are many people in many places, very likely within our very own church, who may have their names written on the roll of church members but whose names are not written in the Lamb's book of life. You see, membership in the church of Jesus Christ never precedes faith in Him. Rather, genuine salvation in Christ instantly places all true believers into the worldwide church of Jesus Christ. At the same time, salvation also compels believers to identify with a local congregation through baptism by immersion and to join in the worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and evangelism of that local congregation.

Now, with that said, I want to look back to last week, when I mentioned that you and I should live in constant amazement of God's Word and the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and I suppose that as soon as I had said that, most of you had a pretty good idea about what I was going to say. However, with this second point—that we should live in constant amazement and admiration of the church—I am not so sure that everyone can so quickly guess what I mean. Maybe I am wrong about this, but my initial perception is that many of our perspectives about the church are so much smaller than they should be that this second point of application may sound a bit, or even a lot, odd.

Let me explain what I mean. As many of you are aware, I am a member of the Kiwanis Club, and I am proud to be so. It is a very fine organization with very laudable purposes. I know that many of you belong to similar organizations, such as Lions, Rotary, and others, and I am certain that the same esteem could be ascribed to them as well. But, as worthwhile as these clubs and service organizations are, they are not the church. Please do not think that I am trying to disparage these history have done, of elevating the church above the very God who has ordained it. Furthermore, no one has ever been nor will anyone ever *be*, saved

by joining a church. Salvation is through explicit personal faith in Christ alone. Please realize organizations; I most certainly am not. They are, indeed, extremely valuable to our community and beyond.

However, having said that, no institution or organization of earth can even remotely compare to the church of Jesus Christ. First of all, every other organization on earth has its headquarters in places like Omaha, NE, or Dallas, TX, or even New York City...and all of these are fine places. However, the headquarters of the church are not on earth at all, they are in heaven. Whereas earthly organizations have man-made memos and by-laws, the church gets its instructions and guidelines directly from God Himself, as He has sent them down through the Holy Spirit in the form of God's divinely inspired, inerrant, infallible Word. What's more, the CEO's and presidents of every other organization on earth are men and women, fine and intelligent people, no doubt, but they are mere people nonetheless. The Head of the church, on the other hand, is none other than history's only Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Prince of Peace, and King of Kings. The Head of the church is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Finally, every organization of earth will one day cease to exist, but the true church of Jesus Christ will live on forever, set apart for all eternity as the radiant, redeemed, blessed, bona fide, purchased, and purified bride of Christ unto the glory of God. Let there be no doubt, the church is the greatest organization on earth, and it's not even close!

There is no other organization that is so ordained and attended to by the one great God of all Creation. The worldwide church is the consecrated collection of God's elect from every nation. It is the assembly of the redeemed of God. It is the entrusted keeper of God's commanded God's holy ordinances. It is the beautiful bride of Christ. Aren't you amazed that God, by His grace, has grafted us into such a magnificent institution? Psalm 84 expresses the unmitigated elation that should characterize our present attitudes toward this remarkable privilege: Psalm 84:1,10 – *How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD Almighty! ... A single day in your courts is better than a thousand anywhere else! I would rather be a gatekeeper in the house of my God than live the good life in the homes of the wicked.*

Let us, then, be likeminded today and express our utmost gratitude to God for the grace we have received! This Thanksgiving, let us be sincerely thankful for the church and the amazing grace God has given to allow sinners like us to become part of earth's supreme institution, because by God's loving kindness and by His merciful grace, those of us who are in Christ Jesus have been exalted to an incomparable privilege—we have been made part of the body of Christ. If this

astonishing truth fails to amaze and delight you today, then either I have explained it poorly, or you may need to check your spiritual pulse.

Are we appropriately amazed by this understanding of the church? If we are, then how else shall we respond than with genuine thanksgiving and a spirit of spiritual jubilation? By these ecclesiastical truths, the Holy Spirit calls us to come and participate in the church with joy and appreciation. If we are properly amazed by the church of Jesus Christ, how could we ever come to it with whiny, argumentative, or combative spirit? How could we possibly partake of such a blessed institution with personal vendettas or big egos? Let me assure you, even as I assure myself of the same, you and I need the church of Jesus Christ infinitely more than it needs us. The church does not exist for you as its members, and it certainly does not exist for me as its pastor. It exists for Jesus Christ and for the eternal glory of God. Let us, then, as the song says, come into His presence with thanksgiving in our hearts and give Him praise! Let us come to the church and worship the Lord in true reverence and awe!

That brings us to our third point of application today, which is this: Growing Christians are amazed by the Gospel.

Let me ask you this morning, how completely do you and I understand the Good News of Jesus Christ? Over the years of my personal walk with Christ, I have become convinced of one reliable response to this question, and that is this: Our understanding of the Gospel is directly proportional to our amazement of it. That is to say, as we grow in genuine knowledge of the Gospel, we will invariably grow in astonishment of it. And the opposite is also true: As we grow in reverent amazement of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we can be certain that our true understanding of it is increasing as well. Are you amazed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ today? Does its message of love, mercy, forgiveness, and grace astonish you daily?

Let me humbly assure you this morning that if we are not thoroughly overwhelmed and completely overjoyed by the truth that Jesus Christ was sacrificed for us, then we have not thought about it in the power of the Spirit as thoroughly as we ought. Does it boggle our minds today that the eternal Son of God, the sinless Savior, God in the flesh, would suffer and die for your sake and mine? // If it doesn't, then we can be sure of this: We have too high a view of ourselves and too low a view of Jesus Christ. // The fact that Jesus Christ—the matchless King of kings and Lord of Lords—should be offered as a substitute for us and take the punishment that we, and not He, deserves is simply too fantastic,

too wonderful, too mysterious to ever become commonplace. Yet both sides of that statement are true, are they not? Jesus Christ has indeed paid the price for our sins, and yet, by our actions, we all too often categorize this impossibly magnificent truth among the mundane monotony of life.

Has the Gospel lost its unsurpassed luster in our lives and in our conversation? Brothers and sisters this must never be! If we are to grow consistently as Christians and if we are to become as salt and light to a dying world, then we must ever remain amazed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Certainly, the Gospel amazed its original hearers and witnesses:

- Matthew 7:28 – *When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching.*
- Mark 11:18 – *The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.*
- Mark 15:39 – *And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, “Surely this man was the Son of God!”*
- The Gospel absolutely overwhelmed and excited the Apostles as well:
 - Listen to the passion with which the Apostle Paul describes the Gospel: Romans 1:15-17 – *That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome. I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”*
 - The Apostle Peter’s excitement about the Gospel message was no less than Paul’s – 1 Peter 1:3-4 – *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you.*

Indeed, all throughout history, the Gospel of Jesus Christ has amazed and astounded everyone who has truly understood its perfect power, its flawless hope, and the priceless love of God that it reveals.

- William Tyndale – “‘Euangelion’ (which we call ‘Gospel’) is a Greek word, and signifies good, merry, glad, and joyful tiding, that makes a man’s heart glad, and makes him sing, dance, and leap for joy.”
- Martin Luther – “The gospel is like a fresh, mild, and cool air in the extreme heat of summer, a solace and comfort in the anguish of the conscience.”

-- A.B. Simpson is reported to have said that the gospel “Tells rebellious men that God is reconciled, that justice is satisfied, that sin has been atoned for, that the judgment of the guilty may be revoked, the condemnation of the sinner canceled, the curse of the Law blotted out, the gates of hell closed, the portals of heaven opened wide, the power of sin subdued, the guilty conscience healed, the broken heart comforted, the sorrow and misery of the Fall undone.”

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is not only the self-ascribed “Good News,” it is without question the best news imaginable.

What else can I say? The majesty of the Gospel and its centrality to all that is good is simply too great for my mere words to express. Let me ask you, are you thankful for its truth today? Does your heart rejoice to know that, while you and I were still sinners, God sent His only Son to die on the cross for us and pay the price for our sins? Does this truth motivate and direct your every thought and action, or do you take it for granted and miss the blessings of true understanding and the unrivaled joy for living that it brings? Are our lives and attitudes really giving God the tremendous thanksgiving that He is clearly due because of His amazing grace?

Let me close with a brief word study: Did you know that the word “gratitude” comes from the same root as the word “grace,” and that the word “grace” signifies the free and boundless mercy of God? Furthermore, did you know that the word “thanksgiving” comes from the same root as the word “think?” Therefore, to think is to thank. If we will sincerely think about the infinitely abundant grace of our God, as expressed in the life and death of Jesus Christ our Lord, how can we not thank Him with sincere hearts and praise Him with heartfelt joy? He has grafted us into the church of Jesus Christ—the greatest institution in all of Creation. We are members of the body of Christ, and no other membership in all the earth can even come close. Let us, therefore, give Him everlasting thanks and earnest praise! Let us worship our great God who has poured out His love for us through Christ Jesus! Let us pour out blissful thanksgiving to God for the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the truth by which we are saved!

I will let the words of G. K. Chesterton transition us into our time of Communion this morning. He once wrote, “When it comes to life, the critical thing is whether you take things for granted or take them with gratitude.” With those opposite perspectives in mind, let me ask you, which will you choose as we come together to observe the Lord’s Supper this morning? I pray that all of us will

come to His table this morning with thanksgiving in our hearts. I pray that each of us will solemnly that this chance to pour out our humble gratitude for the broken body and spilled blood of our Lord.

-- The Lord's Supper

Closing – His Lovingkindness by Samuel Medley

Awake, my soul, to joyful days, and sing thy great Redeemer's praise;
He justly claims a song from me, His loving kindness, oh, how free!
He saw me ruined by the fall, yet loved me notwithstanding all;
He saved me from my lost estate, His loving kindness, oh, how great!
Though num'rous hosts of mighty foes, Though earth and hell my way oppose,
He safely leads my soul along, His loving kindness, oh, how strong!
When trouble, like a gloomy cloud, has gathered thick and thundered loud,
He near my soul has always stood, His loving kindness, oh how good!