

An Attitude of Gratitude

Matthew 6:25-33 (KJV)

25 Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? **26** Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? **27** Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? **28** And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: **29** And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. **30** Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? **31** Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? **32** (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. **33** But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

It seems like people are always worrying about something. Whether it be making preparations for an event, or something minor that occurs during our day, we find an excuse to worry about something. Little do we know; worry is stealing our joy. How are we supposed to enjoy anything when we are constantly worrying?

Jesus tells us not to worry about what we will eat, drink, or wear. Then he asks this great question, “Who among you by worrying can add a single moment to your life?”

You see, the problem with worrying is that it doesn't really accomplish anything.

Even more than that, worrying keeps us from focusing on the things that really matter. I think that's why Jesus was so adamant that we don't worry. If we are worried about the food, how can we enjoy time with family? If we are worried about terrorism, how can we go to the store? If we are worried about getting out of church on time so we can beat the other churches to lunch, how can we worship God?

If we are constantly stuck on the negativity that worry breeds, how can we see, know, and appreciate the countless ways God blesses us, much less give thanks to God for all those things?

I think one of the greatest cures to worry, is constant praise and thanks-giving to God.

God is our Source and Provider, the giver of every good thing.

Alex Haley, an East Tennessean and the author of *Roots*, had an unusual picture hanging on his office wall. It was a picture of a turtle on top of a fence post. When asked, "Why is that there?" Alex Haley answered, "Every time I write something significant, every time I read my words and think that they are wonderful, and I begin to feel proud of myself, I look over at that turtle on top of the fence post and I remember that he didn't get there on his own. He had help."

God has blessed us richly in every way possible. We have all that we need because of God. We are here because God has brought us here. We are blessed because through Jesus Christ, God's amazing grace has poured over us.

We have so much to be thankful for, yet here we are more worried and distracted than thankful.

It is so easy for us to get caught up in worry, to fret, to be distracted by the troubles of this world.

One of the great mistakes of life is to turn to God only in the overpowering emergencies or the shattering crises.

It is so easy for many of us to curse God; to blame God when catastrophe strikes; to feel that God has abandoned us in our times of greatest need.

Yet listen again to Jesus' words to us this morning.

Matthew 6:26-30

26 Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? **27** Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? **28** And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: **29** And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. **30** Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

Jesus knows our worries. Jesus knows that there will be times in our lives when we will feel as if He is not taking care of us.

And so Jesus says to us, in essence, "Look! Look around you! You see the birds are fed. You see the beautiful flowers growing all around you. God did that. And if God will do that for the plants and the animals, God will most certainly take care of you, too!"

Amen?

We make mistakes. We make poor decisions that separate us from God. Still, God's grace extends to us. Still, God loves us and wants the best for us.

Always, by the grace of God we have all that we need! It's not as if we deserve God's blessings! Where would we be without the help of the Lord, without the goodness of the Lord, without the love and faithfulness of our Savior Jesus?

We can try to live without the help of God, but it really is an impossible assignment.

Thanksgiving and Christmas time, is a perfect time for us to set aside our worry, because by being intentional about giving thanks to God, we are forced to focus on everything that is good in our lives.

Practicing "thanks-giving" not only once a year, but every day can help us grow in our relationship with God, it can help us see how richly God blesses us, and it can help us forget about all our worries and fears.

Imagine with me for just a moment, if you will.

What does it look like to the world when we (believers) are constantly running about worried about this or that?

There was a woman, who was busy trying to get out of town for a few days. In the midst of her preparations, there were some unexpected doctor's visits that came up. Trying to fit those into an already busy schedule only raised the anxiety level, and she was nearly at the breaking point. She had stopped thinking rationally. Instead of looking for solutions to the setbacks she was facing, she was busy making excuses about why nothing would work.

It was like a domino effect, one thing went wrong, and that made everything else go bad, too. Does this sound familiar? It's not unique; we all get this way sometimes. Yet we are a people of faith! We are people, who believe that God works good in our lives and in the world all the time, even from the worst of situations.

So when things start to get bad, rather than drowning in worry, we need to lean upon our faith. Amen?

We need to remember that God is with us, that God wants good for us, and will help us through even the most difficult of times. Then, we need to take time to thank God for this life-giving relationship that sustains us through the good times and the bad times. And one of the best ways to show our gratitude to God is by telling others about God's goodness.

You know how it is; when something great happens in our lives, we want to share the wonderful news with everyone we know, and perhaps even everyone we don't know!

This shouldn't be less true of God's blessings in our own lives. Actually, it should be even more true!

Illustration:

There was a man who served as a medical missionary for many years in India. He served in an area where there was progressive blindness. People were born with healthy vision, but there was something in that area that caused people to lose their sight as they matured. Well, this medical missionary developed a process that would stop progressive blindness. So people came to him and he performed his operation, and they would leave realizing that they would have become blind, but now they were going to be able to see for the rest of their lives. The people never said: "Thank you," to this missionary because that phrase was not in their dialect/language. Instead, they spoke a word that meant: "I will tell your name." So, wherever they went, they would tell the name of the missionary who had cured their blindness. They had received something so wonderful that they eagerly proclaimed it!

Have we not received something so wonderful that we eagerly proclaim it? God has been so good to us, He loves us so much, and if we really want to thank God, we just can't keep the wonderful news inside us! We have to go and tell the name of Jesus in the world!

I believe very strongly, that the cure for anxiety and worry is thanks-giving.

We did that recently as we gathered around the table with family and friends for fellowship and good food.

We will thank God for the people around us, for the food on our tables, for the securities we enjoy, and the gifts given and received...

But this is not something we can do just once a year, or even just once a week in worship.

If we are to move beyond worry, as that old saying goes, we have to "accentuate the positive." We have to express our gratitude to God every single day. We have to thank God by sharing the message of God's great love, which has transformed and blessed us.

We have to thank God by serving others in the name of Christ, and by bringing others nearer to God through our witness and witnessing.

We have to thank God by anticipating with great joy that day when we will all gather around the great Thanksgiving Table, with Jesus the host in our midst, and young and old alike lifting voices together in praise of God's Divine Goodness!