

A Few Reasons to be Thankful

Hebrews 10:11-18

Introduction

Weren't these Scriptures depressing? Wow!

We began with Daniel's declaration:

There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations ... (Daniel 12:1)

In the Gospel reading, Jesus echoed the same theme:

When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains. (Mark 13:7-8)

In other words, once it gets bad, it's only just started. We are left with a picture of the end of time in which things are an absolute mess. Wow. No comfort there.

As I began thinking about this sermon, and read Daniel and the Gospel, I thought "Hopefully the Hebrews text is a good one!" But not so. It begins:

Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. (Hebrews 10:11)

Isn't that a sad picture? These faithful priests are simply doing their "duty" ... all the while knowing that what they do accomplishes absolutely nothing.

Now, at this point in my sermon preparation, I'm thinking and praying "O Lord, I do not want to preach this sermon. I don't like being the prophet of gloom and doom. Please, Lord, let me find something in these texts that allows me to bring a word of hope to this congregation."

And when I looked again I saw that word. Hebrews 10:12:

But... (Hebrews 10:12)

Those who have recently participated in my 1 Peter Inductive Bible study recognize the word "but" as a transitional word. A word that indicates a change in direction. In the midst of the gloom and doom of the day's readings, this word stands out as a word of hope – a word that indicates a new reality, a new perspective.



I said a quick "Thank You Jesus!" and read on.

*But when **this** priest... (Hebrews 10:12)*

This priest is in contrast to those priests. When you read the larger context you know the writer of Hebrews is switching from talking about every human priest to Jesus. He is "this priest." So the verse could easily read "But when Jesus ..."

*But when **this** priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins ... (Hebrews 10:12)*

One sacrifice. For all time. The Old Testament priests offered the same sacrifices, day after day, again and again.

Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. (Hebrews 10:11)

Jesus offered one sacrifice, for all time.

*But when **this** priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins ... (Hebrews 10:12)*

That is a critically important bit of good news in the overall context of gloom and doom. It gets beautifully expressed in verse 14:

For by (that) one sacrifice he (Jesus) has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. (Hebrews 10:14)

Now granted, that verse is a bit confusing. So here is how a more contemporary version phrases it:

It was a perfect sacrifice by a perfect person to perfect some very imperfect people. By that single offering, (Jesus) did everything that needed to be done ... (Hebrews 10:14, The Message)

By now in my sermon preparation, my whole outlook on this sermon had changed. I was now praying a prayer of thanksgiving because I was seeing in this text several reasons for me to be thankful. Let me share a few of them:

1: I'M THANKFUL ... THAT GOD SEES ME AS A PERSON OF VALUE

For by (that) one sacrifice he (Jesus) has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. (Hebrews 10:14)

Did you catch that? His sacrifice makes me perfect and holy.

The concept of becoming holy and being made perfect is captured in the theological word "sanctification." Sanctified objects have been set aside for special use. It's like the difference between fine china and paper plates. If you haven't heard it before, remind me sometime to tell you the story about my Mom's china.

By His sacrifice on the cross, Jesus transforms each Christian into something of great value.

The Book of Ephesians calls us "God's handiwork ..."

For we are God's handiwork ... (Ephesians 2:10)

1 John reminds us:

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! (1 John 3:1)

We are God's handiwork. We are God's children. But, get this ...

You are precious in my eyes ... and I love you. (Isaiah 43:4)

That is going to be my new response whenever someone asks me "How are you today?" I'm precious.

Because of what Jesus has done in that one perfect sacrifice, the God of the universe thinks you are precious. What a great reason to be thankful!

2: I'M THANKFUL ... THAT GOD CALLS ME INTO A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM

Verse 16 reads like this:

"This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds." (Hebrews 10:16)

In the Old Testament the covenant was inscribed on tablets of stone. Pastor Powell is teaching about the stone covenant in one of the adult Sunday School classes. Originally God's relationship to His people was oriented around an external inanimate object: Tablets of stone brought down from the mountain by Moses.

But now, God says, our relationship happens within you, in our hearts and in our minds. That's why we talk about Jesus living in our hearts. That's where the relationship occurs -- internally. And in that way God's presence within us impacts what we feel and how we think which in turn impacts how we respond and who we are.

Because it is internal rather than external, our relationship with God becomes something very personal and very real. If it was based on the external we could never be fully confident that we are included. But because it happens within us, we can for absolutely certainty that we have a home in heaven when we die.

That's what 1 John 5:13 reinforces to us:

My purpose in writing is simply this: that you who believe in God's Son will know beyond the shadow of a doubt that you have eternal life. (1 John 5:13, The Message)

Because of what Jesus has done in that one perfect sacrifice, God of the universe thinks you are precious and He established within you a relationship that will take you safely to heaven. What a great reason to be thankful!

3: I'M THANKFUL ... THAT GOD NO LONGER REMEMBERS MY FAILINGS

Look again at verse 17:

Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more. (Hebrews 10:17)

Early in my ministry I met a man who told me that he had never sinned. He genuinely believed that. I met him doing door-to-door visitation. He graciously invited me into his home, and invited me to come back as often as I wanted. Which I did. But I was never able to convince him the truth of the Scriptures that:

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23)

Most of us don't have that issue. We know we've messed up, and we spend huge amounts of time trying to make sure other people never find out how much we've messed up. And we have very hopeful that God never finds out!

In fact, a good many people even believe that what they've done wrong in their lives is so horrific that God could never ever love them. They are just too bad to ever be accepted. But that belief is actually generated by the devil. The Scriptures tell us that is eager to forgive us:

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

And when He forgives, He promises:

Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more. (Hebrews 10:17)

By the way, there's more to the story of my sinless friend. Several months after we first met I was on my way home from visiting another family when I absent-mindedly made a wrong turn. I was a few blocks from his house when I realized I was going the wrong direction, so I decided to pop in to see him.

The day before his doctor told him that he had pancreatic cancer and didn't have much time. He was hoping to be able to talk to me because he couldn't get the words of Romans 3:23 out of his mind: "*For all have sinned ...*" For the first time in his life, he prayed that day with me coaching him through the prayer. He asked God to forgive him and received Christ as his personal Savior.

Because of what Jesus has done in that one perfect sacrifice, God of the universe not only thinks you are precious, and not only has established within you a relationship that will take you safely to heaven, but in the act of His forgiveness chooses to forget every sin you and I have ever committed. What a great reason to be thankful!

APPLICATION

I am going to encourage you to do two things this week – two things that will give you the opportunity to express your own reasons to be thankful.

First, I am encouraging you to incorporate in some way a statement of thanksgiving to God for His love and forgiveness into your family gathering. Sometimes our expressions of thanksgiving focus more on temporal things (our home, our family) in such moments. But this year, I'm encouraging you to tell your family members how much God means to you as well. Let your light shine!

Second, I am encouraging you to come to our worship service on Tuesday night so that together as the Body of Christ we can offer a corporate expression of thankfulness to our God. One hour. 7 p.m. Tuesday evening.

One last reason for me to be thankful: Those Old Testament priests, day after day, again and again, had to stand before their congregations offering up religious activities that accomplished nothing of eternal value. I'm thankful that I am able to stand before you and tell you about things that do make a difference. An eternal difference.

I'm thankful indeed. Amen.