

Thankful

Ephesians 5:15-20

Introduction

There is a great story in Acts 20 about a young man named Eutychus who fell asleep during one of the Apostle Paul's sermons. Perhaps you remember reading that story in it in your 5x5x5 readings. If you are not familiar with it, the story goes like this:

On the first day of the week (the church at Troas) came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting. Seated in a window was a young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. When he was sound asleep, he fell to the ground from the third story and was picked up dead. Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him. "Don't be alarmed," he said. "He's alive!" Then (the boy) went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, (Paul) left. The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted. (Acts 20:7-12)

I wonder if the Apostle had that story in mind when he quoted the words that began today's second lesson:

Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you. (Ephesians 5:14)

This is the fifth of six sermons in a series that seeks to answer the question "Who Am I?" My goal in this series is to help each of us understand and confidently affirm our identity in Jesus, so that ...

When I say, "I am a Christian," what does that mean? Who am I?

So far in this series we have defined ourselves as:

- Christians who are built on firm foundation of faith that sustains us through the storms of life
- Christians who sink their roots down in the affirming love of God

Christians who are only one part – but one very important part – of the Body of Christ

- Christians who, like body builders, build up the Body of Christ.

Today you can almost hear the Apostle raise his voice a little as he calls on people of faith to "wake up." In a world where faith is under a constant challenge, Paul reminded his readers (in verses just before our text):

Live as children of light ... and find out what pleases the Lord. (Ephesians 5:8, 10)

If we wanted to focus on a negative, we could answer the “Who am I” question with a “I am asleep because the sermon is too long!” But that’s not the direction the text takes us! Instead the text challenges us to have an ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE. We read that, as God’s children, we should always be ...

... giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 5:20)

Gratitude is not a natural trait, is it? Remember your mother saying to you ...

What are the magic words? And the correct answer is: Please and thank you.

We have to learn to be grateful people. Gratitude is not part of the sinful nature we inherited from Adam and Eve. No child comes out of the womb proclaiming, “Thank you mother for giving me life!” No! Babies are born screaming because the room is cold, the lights are bright and they are hungry.

A large family sat around the breakfast table one morning. As was the family custom, the father offered thanks before the meal, asking God to bless the food. Immediately after his prayer, however, as was his bad habit, he began to grumble about hard times, the poor quality of the food he was forced to eat, the way it was cooked, and much more.

His little daughter interrupted him, “Dad, do you suppose God heard what you said a little while ago when you were giving thanks?”

“Certainly,” the father replied with the confident air of an instructor.

“And did he hear what you said about the bacon and the coffee?”

“Of course,” replied the father with a note of caution in his voice.”

Then his daughter asked, “Dad, which one did God believe?”

Gratitude may not be a part of our human nature, but the text tells us it IS a sign of the transformed nature that we develop as we follow Christ. That’s why Paul tells us “Wake up and live as children of light!”

So as we follow Christ and grow in our relationship with Him, we should be able to say:

Who am I? I am a Christian who is filled with gratitude for what God has done in my life.

Look at what this text teaches:

#1: GRATITUDE RESULTS FROM KNOWING GOD’S WILL

Look at verse 17:

Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. (Ephesians 5:17)

Once again, Paul draws a contrast between those who are wise and those who are foolish ... only this time he connects it to the attitude of gratitude. Thankful people know the will of God.

If the lector would have read four more verses in Proverbs, we would have heard the familiar words:

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. For through wisdom your days will be many, and years will be added to your life. If you are wise, your wisdom will reward you; if you are a mocker, you alone will suffer. (Proverbs 9:10-12)

Fear, not in the sense of being scared or frightened. The word means to be in awe. And when you know what God is doing – when you see God at work around you – one result is a sense of gratitude that God is in charge and is at work on your behalf.

No matter what the subject may be, my will is mere foolishness. But as I seek and discover the will of God, I gain wisdom.

There have been many times in my life where I have prayed “God I don't know what You are doing.” There are some instances where I am still praying. But without fail, in those instances where I come to see what God is doing, I am filled with gratitude.

In our Tuesday morning Men's Bible Study, John Ober led us in singing the little chorus “Open My Eyes, Lord.” It's a great song, but it is a better prayer. For with eyes and hearts that are open, I discover the will of God. And I am thankful.

#2: GRATITUDE REFLECTS THE PRESENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Look at verse 18:

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. (Ephesians 5:18)

Something fills you. Right now, something fills you. You are not an empty cavity. Nature hates a vacuum so something fills up every empty space.

Speaking to a large audience, D.L. Moody held up a glass jar and asked, “How can I get the air out of this jar?” One man shouted, “Suck it out with a pump!” Moody replied, “That would create a vacuum and shatter the glass.” After numerous other suggestions Moody smiled, picked up a pitcher of water, and filled the glass. “There,” he said, “all the air is now removed.” He then went on to explain that victory in the Christian life is not accomplished by “sucking out a sin here and there,” but by being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Jesus illustrated that point with a teaching about casting out demons. He said:

When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, "I will return to the house I left." When it arrives, **it finds the house unoccupied**, swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation." (Matthew 12:43-45)

Something needs to fill the space. And the thing that fills you determines what comes out of you.

One commentator wrote:

Whatever fills you, controls you.

- If a man is filled with anger, then anger controls his life.
- If a man is filled with greed, then greed dominates his life.
- If a man is filled with lust, then lust governs his life.
- If a man is filled with love, then love influences all he does.
- And if a man is filled with the Holy Spirit, he is controlled by the Spirit - it is, if you will, "control by consent."

Genuine Christian gratitude only happens if the Holy Spirit is there.

#3: GRATITUDE RISES FROM YOUR HEART

Look at verse 19:

... speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music **from your heart** to the Lord, (Ephesians 5:19)

I read a story about a woman whose daughter wanted to learn how to play an instrument, so for her 12th birthday the mother bought her daughter a beautiful Baby Grand Piano. A few weeks later, one of her friends asked her how the daughter's piano lessons were going.

"Oh," the mother said, "I persuaded her to switch to a clarinet."

"Why?" asked the friend.

"Well," she paused. "With a clarinet, she can't sing when she plays."

You've heard it before, but the Scripture only requires a "joyful noise."

Make a joyful noise unto the Lord (Psalm 100:1)

The point of this message, though, isn't the quality of the noise. It has to do with its origin. Where does it come from?

Did you realize that the music God loves doesn't come from your mouth? It comes from your heart. But it is through the music of our hearts that God ministers.

- King Saul used to be overcome by a spirit of depression, so David would sing to him.
- Paul and Silas were jailed for preaching the gospel. But when they started to sing, the doors of the jail sprung open.
- The largest book of your Bible is a hymnal! There are 150 chapters in it.

No matter what the circumstances may be, sing. Sing words of thanksgiving to God.

APPLICATION

Max Lucado tells about living as an American in Brazil. One day, as he was walking along the street on his way to the University to teach a class, he felt a tug on his pants leg. Turning around, he saw a little boy about 5 or 6 years old with dark beady eyes and a dirty little face.

The little boy looked up at the big American and said, "Bread, Sir." He was a little beggar boy and Lucado said, "There are always little beggar boys in the streets of Brazil. Usually I turn away from them because there are so many and you can't feed them all. But there was something so compelling about this little boy that I couldn't turn away.

So, taking his hand, I said, 'Come with me' and I took him into a coffee shop." Max told the owner, "I'll have a cup of coffee and give the boy a piece of pastry...whatever he wants." Since the coffee counter was at the other end of the store, Max walked on and got a cup of coffee, forgetting about the little boy because beggar boys usually get the bread and then run back out into the street and disappear.

But this one didn't. After he got his pastry, he went over to the big American and just stood there until Lucado felt his staring eyes. Lucado said, "I turned and looked at him. Standing up, his eyes just about hit my belt buckle. Then slowly his eyes came up until they met mine. The little boy, holding his pastry in one hand, looked up and said, 'Thank you, sir. Thank you very much.'"

Lucado said, "I was so touched by the boy's thanks that I would have bought him the store. I sat there for another 30 minutes, late for my class, just thinking about a little beggar boy who came back and said, 'Thank you.'"

This young lad had an attitude of thankfulness and it was expressed. If we have this attitude, it will show. We will be expressive, we will be praising God; we will have joy in our hearts. Having an attitude of thankfulness is an ultra important characteristic in the life of a follower of Jesus.

Who am I? I am thankful.

Amen.