

“Count Your Blessings”

By Chris Ulrich

Sunday, September 21st, 2014

Please be seated. I want to welcome you back, Parrish, I know that you out here, but let's give the Lord a praise for Parrish the back amongst us. Parrish is one of our fellowship leaders for those of you who don't know. My name is Chris Ulrich, and I one of preaching team here, and thank God for that.

This month has been the month of sanctification; we read that Scripture, but I'm going to read it again:

Joshua 3:5 *And Joshua said unto the people, Sanctify yourselves: for to morrow the Lord will do wonders among you.*

I know we're getting close to the end of this month, the end of this month of sanctification, but I hope we've all gotten something out of it, I know I have. That basket back there, I know I need to put something in it [Editor's Note: the basket he's talking about is the basket when people were supposed to leave notes describing blessings they received during the time of sanctification.]. I know it's not something that we just come to God to make requests, it's important that we thank God for what he's done for us, the blessings as he's poured. I know we're going to get into that a little bit later. It's a spiritual thing, it's not like changing seasons, I mean, sanctifying. It's something I looked up in the Concordance. I think most of us use that term here. It's interesting because, in the Old Testament the term sanctify has all the same meanings. In other words, there's a reference in the Hebrew, and this is not going to be too lengthy as far as a Bible study, but this was actually a little surprising, most terms say 'love' or 'behold' or 'wonder.' If you look in the concordance, it will give you several different definitions, based on the context of that term. It was a little surprising to see that reference number 6942 was the exact same definition for every time sanctify it is used in the Old Testament. It's used 59 times in the Old Testament. I thought, "That's consistency." It always means exactly one thing; there's no if's, and's, or but's, about it. It's about: To pronounce clean, to dedicate, to hallow, or to purify; that would be the gist of the definition of sanctify. Again, it's really been a worthwhile endeavor for this month and something that we did last year, and something we will continue to do.

I So the preaching this month has been from the book of Ephesians. Parrish, you creature from chapter 1, but you also gave us some of the history of Ephesus, and how it was a city given over to idolatry it was a good history lesson and I thought that the reference you used from Acts chapter 19, and you said that there was a spirit of idolatry upon that city. What's relevant to what you brought into this day and age was that there are cities in the United States and throughout the world which have a similar type of spirit. Or they have something about that city that they are known for. Like Las Vegas, I mean, like my mind was racing, "Yeah, you think about gambling." Or you think about some cities, really, they are known as a pipeline for drugs coming into the United States. I'm not saying that that is that the entire city's purpose, and I'm not here to badmouth some certain areas, but it's a matter of understanding that these places have gained a reputation. I mean like Miami; I remember going down there in the late 80s, after boot camp, I remember looking around, like there was a real spirit upon it. So, what you were saying, it wasn't just a figment of your imagination. It's something that's actual; it's something that's real. But, one thing's for sure, that God can cut through the nonsense quicker than a hot knife thru butter.

I know Jesse, last week you shared about the grace of God, and one question that you asked, in Genesis, where it said Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord-that's one of my favorite verses, like Noah, we have also found grace in the eyes of the Lord-but the question you asked was, would he have found grace if he refused to build the ark that God told him to build? The answer is no, and the same

thing holds true today if we refuse to keep God's commandments, we're not going to find grace in God's eyes. It's the same thing.

I'm going to ask if everybody could turn to Ephesians chapter 3; we're actually going to go from back to the front on this one. This one verse, I just want to set a tone a little bit here.

Ephesians 3:20 *Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,*

I know this verse is at the end of the chapter but I want to lay a foundation and get people thinking about it, thinking about it personally about all the ways that God has done exceeding abundantly above all that you have asked or thought. It's going to be one of my main topics so if you want to jot this verse down as a point of emphasis. For now though I'd like to bring your attention to the first fifteen verses of Ephesians 3.

Ephesians 3:1-15 *For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory. For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,*

We know that the Bible talks about every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. And I know that in this day and age, I suppose in any day and age with a past history where there's been opposition, and there always has, there's been persecution, there's been naysayers, there's been unbelievers, there have been plenty of people down through the ages that didn't agree with it, didn't believe in it, the market is much is possible, although the Bible does say that God is not mocked, whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap. There's a lot of reading but it builds up and climaxes in verse 14 and 15, that whole family of God is in the name of Jesus Christ. My first point today is about the importance of the name of Jesus, and knowing that it is the name of the Lord, it is the only name whereby we must be saved, and if trust in Him we'll find there is wonder working power in that name (I know that's a little bit older of the song-I'm not going to sing that). There was something you mentioned a couple of weeks ago, Parrish, from Exodus 20:7: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that takes his name in vain." You mentioned how much it drives you nuts (myself, too, and I believe every one of us that names the name of Jesus) to hear the name of the Lord taken in vain. I'm not going to say that-when I wasn't a Christian, I used the name of the Lord in vain, and the truth is, it just flowed out like water. I mean, it just came out, and it was like it was without shame. But, when you come to the knowledge of the truth... What was interesting was, myself and, I think it was Ed H., were talking, either this morning, or a couple of days ago, but we were

talking about Ground Zero. What was interesting is that, a lot of times, we think about Ground Zero we think about New York, what happened with the World Trade Center, and it's a term we've become very familiar with. What was interesting was I actually looked up the term and it is at the point of, or just below, where a nuclear explosion occurs. So, the truth is, because there had never been anything quite like what happened there, they just called it Ground Zero. It can also mean the beginning of something. It's like with us, it is Ground Zero when we come to the knowledge of God, behold all things are become new, there is a new start. We don't take the name of the Lord in vain, because it's sanctified. It is something that we take seriously, and it's something that we understand. It's something that we fall in love with. We understand that, "You know what? This is precious." I'm just going to share something, Sister Beverly our prayers are with you, it's something that we need to uphold her and our brother Charles, as he's near passing. It's something that, "Precious in the sight of the Lord, is the death of his Saints." I don't share that because, well, this is just a good thing to say, we talked out in the hallway a little bit earlier, and our heart is with you. It's something that-I remember when you have baptized a few years back, and I thought, "This is great. This is a life changer. " This is a life changer, and it's not something we take lightly. We look at it like, the power of God, and that name Jesus Christ, we understand that there are so many things that change for the better. Once we understand, once we start to see that it is something different, there is a change for the better, that it is our life at Ground Zero in going forward.

Acts 4:1-12 *And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide. Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand. And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes, And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this? Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*

Don't worry, that's the last lengthy passage we're going to be reading today. But we look at that power that God gives us, it changes people's lives for the better. It gives us the kind of power to drive off those demons which come to us in the middle of the night or the middle of the day, for that matter. It gives us power to pray; it gives power to share with people, it's the name that we get baptized in. Proverbs 18:10 tells us that the name of the Lord is a strong tower and the righteous run into it and are safe. I have to say that, shortly after getting baptized, I remember that there was that safety that I did feel, that I knew wasn't there prior to being born again. I mean, it was tangible, but it was also intangible. When we think about how God is an invisible God, and He touches us in ways that are tangible, but He also touches us in ways that are intangible. I'm talking about in our soul, in our spirit, in our mind. Things that we can't physically see, I mean, we can physically break open somebody's skull and look at the anatomy of it, but we're talking about being able to search what's in each person's mind, what's in each person's heart, only God can do that. God does know us better than we know ourselves. If you don't believe that-and I have to say, I kind of fought with that for a while -but then, in the New Testament, it talks about that He knows the very number of hairs on our head; I don't know how many hairs are on my head. I'm not going to try counting them either. For those of us that are bald... He knows other things about you too.

It's true that this account from Acts 4 was written thousands of years ago and I suppose in some circles would make it easy to dismiss. I think a lot of times people think, "always outdated. It's not relevant." We can't worry about all the naysayers, the unbelievers or the ungodly. And this isn't about living off yesterdays or yesteryear's blessings either, but knowing that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and that power is going to reign continuously. It's going to be something that's forever. It's never going to change. We're not going to wake up tomorrow and, "Well, it's changed." Or next week, "Well, it's changed." And, Abby, like you mentioned in your prayer, there's gross darkness, and morality seems to be in decline. I'm going to share something, and, this isn't about bashing any one particular person, but, I thought about this, and I'm going to name the person, and I'm going to tell you what it was, because I thought, "I can't believe this." A lot of us know who Nicki Minaj is, and this isn't about bad-mouthing her, because I've mentioned Miley Cyrus from this pulpit before. It's not about we're not praying that hopefully that they'll change their lives, but, you know what? There's a song that she came out with recently in a video called "Anaconda." I thought, "Okay, I'm not going to watch the video." But, the other day, I thought, "I'm going to look up the lyrics. I just want to see what the lyrics say." I read through it, and, I'm appalled, but I'm not appalled. It was the kind of thing where it's like, "Does this surprise me? No, this doesn't surprise me." It was the kind of thing where it's like, if ungodliness is what people want, then ungodliness is what people are going to get. Just because there is that element in society that, like you said Abby, just becomes overwhelming, and inundating, it doesn't mean it's going to affect us. I mean, you think about this is something that we talked about, when the children of Israel were in Egypt (I'm getting little bit away from my notes, but I'm coming back) and held that, when God word out the plagues that he did, wouldn't you think that at least some of the Israelites would have been affected by the frogs, and the lice, and the blood in the river, and all this other stuff? How did God create separation between the people at the plagues were poured out upon, and the Israelites? God does things in mysterious ways, and I just look at it like, it's God. I have no explanation for it; the secret things belong to God. I just look at it like, "Thank God we're on the Lord's side!" I said before, it's good to know His name. It *is* good to know His name; it's Jesus, it's not Buddha, it's not Hindu, it's not Allah, on and on, go down the list. We don't go out and try to start arguments with people, "What do you believe?" The truth is, Christ said, "**If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto me.**" So, it's a matter of like-if people want to sit there-one thing we've noticed, more and more, in this day and age, Is that any time anything happens to anyone who even claims Christianity, just lump them all together. This Christian church had this ungodly practice, or they did this, or this guy did that, and he claims to be a Christian... That's not true. The thing is, we have to look at it like, to discern good from evil, we have to have that understanding, and God will give us that understanding.

Which brings me to our next point, but this one is going to be a little lengthier because I'm going to ask for some participation in a few minutes.

Ephesians 3:20-21 *Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.*

When we think about how God does exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, a lot of things can come to mind. Our health, family, jobs, and our places of residence are just of few of the physical blessings. On the spiritual side we have the healing in our spirit, the confidence that God gives us, the ability to forgive and be forgiven, the vision to understand and discern good and evil. But before I go any further I want to highlight a point that might hold us back at times and I want you to really hear my heart on this. I say "us" because I know I'm in that boat, too, and don't want it to sound as though I'm casting judgment or like it's someone else's problem. . So, please hear this. Anyway, I know that whenever we have something to be thankful for, we might subconsciously think we don't want to thank God because someone might be left out. I think that's a little bit more when we're in a public arena, say if we're in a prayer meeting, or we're in a group of people. Not always, but I'm going to give some examples that I think will make sense but first I'm going to ask this question. How many of you have ever

felt like you didn't get something from God that someone else did and it just didn't seem fair? Okay, that's a true thing; that's a true emotion that we're going to have. I know I have and I know it wasn't pleasant, but that I just had to deal with it-all, I know a few years ago you had a hat said, "Just deal with it."-But, we've got to know that God is not unrighteous to forget our work and our labor of love, and what we've done, and it might seem like we're getting the short end of the stick...

So here are the examples that I wanted to share; If I say, I'm thankful I have a job and someone else is unemployed they might feel excluded. If I say, I'm thankful for my eyesight and someone is blind they might feel that they can't partake in that ability. We might be in a prayer meeting and someone might be thanking God for a healing touch they received, where someone else is still waiting; they might feel like they missed the boat, or got the short end of the stick, or however else you want to put it. So I know the thought that crosses my mind at times is, "I won't say anything," if I know in the back of my mind that someone might feel be lacking. Has anyone else ever felt that too?

It's not like we're thankful for those things out of spite, that's the argument to that. It's not necessarily like we're standing in a room, and you know somebody's blind, so you say, "Oh, I thank you, God, for my eyesight; I just thank you." I mean, this is not about being mean-spirited, or vicious, or being spiteful; we have to be inclusive. We have to try to wrap our arms around people, get behind them, be supportive. The truth is that we all will receive many different things from God but some will be unique. I'm going to use a few examples: I know, Abby, a few years ago, Abby's a principal in a school nearby, and I remember something you shared, a while back, about praying in the hallways, or praying over the classrooms... And I thought, "That's fantastic!" I mean, I'm not a teacher, or a principal of the school, but I thought, "That is a unique thing. That's something that, God's given her that blessing; God's given her that." It's not about being envious, it's about being appreciative and thankful for something that God's blessed her life with. Laygoze – I've known Laygoze many years, and many of us here as well, and he's got the gift of friendliness. I see Laygoze in places where people were maybe not the nicest to him, and he just goes right on-and I'm not talking about being a doormat, but I'm thinking, "I wouldn't have that nice back." I mean, it's something that's inspiring! I mean, honest to God, it's the kind of thing where you see, and it's strengthening and encouraging. Mike Alford -I know Mike and Linda aren't here, I think-but, Mike's got a gift of encouragement. A lot of times, I'll see him out there, and it's like, "I just want to make it to Heaven!" I do, too. I'll share one quick thing : This was a few weeks ago, we were going to have a fellowship walk, like on a Saturday morning—Mike is not a text-aholic, so, it's not like I'm getting text after text after text after text-- I get this that. Now, it didn't wake me up, but I did wake up a little bit later; 3:28 in the morning, or something like that, "Who is this from, what does this say?" It was from Mike, and he said, "If the devil doesn't like it, he can sit on a tack." Kind of corny, but I'm thinking, like, "wait a minute," and that became the theme of the walk, "We are not ignorant of Satan's devices." Because were not ignorant of Satan's devices. When we have a walk with God, God gives us that discernment to be able to understand what's good and what's not... So, we can't ever stop thanking God for being good to us or giving us things, because not everybody else is going to get the same thing. That's not being selfish. It's being practical but it's also being spiritual and hopefully that makes sense.

Now I know that I mentioned Ephesians 3:20 earlier and that's going to be one of the main points. But I'd like to ask for some participation, now, to hear what God has done for you. It could be recent, it could be something last year, 5 years ago, 10 years ago. It could be a celebration or an anniversary, or a healing touch that you or a loved one has received. Speaking of Mike, I appreciate what Linda Alford shared a couple of months ago about writing these things down. Writing down these blessings that happen, that way, if we look back on it a few years from now, five years from now, 10 years from now, it's like, "Yeah, I remember that, that thing that God did for me that specific night. Or, walking down the street, or..." If we remain faithful we'll never go wrong . I mean, it's like, you start to remember, but then you have it written down, so it brings those things back to remembrance. And by the way, that happens to be the title of the message today, "Count Your Blessings".

I'm going to get the ball rolling, first, just to give you an idea, that things that God has done above all that I could exceeding abundantly ask for think. I've had the same job for the last 16+ years. I know I've shared with a few people, even getting in there... I'm going to share it, because this is something that, I know that it had to have been God, because, I remember during the interview, that the guy asked, "How are you, electrically?" And I said, "I'm not very good." So I heard him asking other questions, and when I got done, I got a second interview, and actually got the job. But I remember, about three months later, that manager, and another guy that was from the same department, the manager was talking to myself and the other guy, and he said, "Yeah, one of the reasons we hired Chris was because he is strong, electrically." But, you know what? At that point, I had learned the job, and I realized that, it is something you can learn. It's not like I was out there as an electrician, that's not what job required or entailed, but, it was just to have a general understanding of electricity. It wasn't long after I started learning that field, that I believe God blessed it. The exceeding abundantly above all that I could ask or think. I feel like I've got good health; I know that could change in a heartbeat. I feel that God gave me a spiritual healing from a demon that had plagued me 25 years ago. I know good and well it was the Lord. And you know what? I said those things because, I know people that are not working. I know that there are people that aren't in good health. And I know people that are still plagued by demons. Not to be comparative, not to compare myself to them, but I need to be supportive of them, too, and know that God can change their life, too. So, be creative, think outside the box, don't be afraid sharing some of the things... I'm not looking for a lengthy testimony, but...

Ken: Yeah, there's two things I want to say. First one was, I was almost, for eight years, because I was doing drugs and alcohol. I got tired of it, and I asked Jesus to show me a way to get off of it, and He did. It was through a program at the VA. To this day, this coming October 27th, it will be 27 years that I've been off of alcohol. The second thing, after almost 50 years, I've been off of cigarettes for almost two years, now. That's a blessing.

Mark: We recently had an admin meeting-I work at Baxter healthcare; I represent the Xerox photocopy services program, and, during the meeting, one of the people humbled me very much by saying, to my manager, "We want to thank you for giving us Mark Lanier." That was such a blessing because it's like, the Bible says to show all good fidelity with your masters, and that's what I'm trying to do my job. During the course of that, I've earned a lot of respect with people, and that's what they thought of me.

Ed H: Last month, we have the church prayer meeting on Wednesday night, and we were mentioning everybody's name, and my sister was real, real ill. She was having an operation that Friday, and we prayed that day. I found out Friday that she did not have that operation, because she woke up Thursday feeling so good, she went to the doctor, and the doctor said, "You don't need that operation." I was just praying for the surgery, but God answered more abundantly, and completely healed her.

Beverly: I was called to the social services office at the Grove. At first, I was kind of nervous, because I didn't know what I was going there for. The social worker sat down with me, and she said, "From the time you walked through these doors, you were in a wheelchair, you were on oxygen 24 hours a day, you were very weak, But you have progressed so much that you are able to go back into the community." So, in the next several months, I will be leaving the Grove and going back into the community.

Greg: About 14 years ago, no, 18 years ago, because yesterday was my birthday-I got baptized September 20th-but the doctors told me shortly after that, that I needed a heart transplant. I'm just thankful right now; I've been on the same job for 16 years.

Rebecca: I've been looking for work for almost 8 years. I have not worked, and I was desperate to the point that I would take any job. The job that I really wanted was With Verizon, because

I've worked there, and I know the kind of work they do. I went to the interview, and I saw the schedule , and it's a retail schedule. It's a mess, because I would be able to come to church, or have any time on the weekend; I would be working almost every weekend. Then, another opportunity came along, but my heart was set on the first one because that's the one that I thought I was going to get hired. Then God opened another door, out of nowhere, that I wasn't even expecting. I've been working for the past three weeks now; I don't have to work any weekends, Monday through Friday, I can go home and be with my family.

I'd like to thank you all for sharing. There's a lot of good to be said for how God works in mysterious ways and blesses all of us. There's a verse in Luke 6 which talks about that God is kind to the unthankful and the evil and that hit me, because if God is kind to the unthankful and the evil, and I'm not saying, and the Bible isn't saying that they have a walk with God, it's just saying that God is kind to them. That, to me, is just mind-boggling, but just think how great God is to us that are thankful, and that are kind, and that are living a sanctified life, a life that is pleasing before the Lord? Think about how God is towards us, and there's no doubt about it, God does do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think.

I want to thank everybody for their time, and I want to thank you for your participation. I look forward to what God has for us for the rest of this month, for the rest of this year, and for the rest of this lifetime. God bless you.

