

**“Our Legacy of Thanks”**  
**By Chris Ulrich**  
**Sunday, November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2013**

Our theme this month has been thankfulness. I just want to share real quick:

***Ephesians 5:20***      *Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;*

Would you bow your heads with me for a word of prayer, please? God, we just thank You this morning for just knowing the truth, and knowing that it’s real, and that we have stuff to give thanks to You for, and for the music this morning, God, and the testimonies, and the praise report that Pastor Paine shared. We thank You for guiding us, we thank You for being real, and for being here. I pray, God, that I would get out of the way and that we would hear from You. In Your name, Jesus, amen.

We have a tradition, here in the United States, and I know that you, Bob Heitzler elaborated on the history of Thanksgiving, and how it came about, the first Thanksgiving, and what went on, and the hardships that people went through. I know, Bob, you shared how that your grandfather was in the Revolutionary War. Now, I’ve got to say that I know Bob is not 250 years old... I think what you meant was great-great-great-great-great-great grandfather. I know my grandfather was in World War II, and Bob and I are about the same age, so I don’t think his grandfather about 250 years old when Bob’s father was born, either. I got a lot out of it, and I appreciate... The title of your sermon was, “Giving Thanks to God in the Little Things.” It’s not like we wait for some big event; It’s not like we wait, even for this time of year. It is something that we focus on, not just a tradition, it’s something that’s important. We’re thankful to God the rest of the year. We’ve gone through some different topics throughout the year—Sound Doctrine has been one of them, we just went through Galatians in the last couple of months, so, it’s a highlight. November has been traditionally been a month set aside for giving thanks. Not that we don’t (or shouldn’t) do throughout the rest of the year it’s just a special time because of the history of Thanksgiving. I know that Parrish shared a couple of weeks ago, and you asked the question, “Who Should Give Thanks?” and the answer is that everybody should give thanks, but the truth is, and one Scripture that you referenced about ten lepers that came to Christ desiring a healing, and they were lepers. That’s something that people have talked about in the last couple of months; Tom mentioned that when he was in France, he visited a leper colony. Personally, I’ve never been to one, so I can’t say that I know much; I’ve looked it up. One thing about it, for sure, is that it is just a devastating disease. It causes limbs to fall off, and I can’t really say that I know much more, but here is the point: Only one came back to give Him thanks. Christ asked, “Where are the other nine?” we can’t be like the other nine. We’ve got to have the point of reference that we’ve got to be thankful.

***Ecclesiastes 12:13-14*** *Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.*

I would say that looking at a verse like that, it probably sounds more like the end of a message rather than the beginning. But we need to have a starting point with regards to this thing we call thankfulness. We can see that the world isn’t filled with it. There’re places,, obviously, where there are people that are genuinely giving thanks to God. What are our options? We could be at the other end of the scale, and we’ll get to that a little bit later, but our option is to fear Go and keep His commandments because this is the whole duty of man. When we believe that, and were sincere about it, that’s knowing the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10). We can’t just look at it from the standpoint of, “Well, what’s

my current situation?” We’re all going to have struggles; we’re all going to have successes in life. I think that’s one of the big things: we have to look at from a big picture standpoint.

We’ve all got different stories, different backgrounds. We’ve all got different backgrounds. There’s a lot of people from a lot of different places. Thank God that God’s called us all to one ministry. Regardless of what our upbringing was or is; we have to look at it like, what do we really think we deserve in this life? I’ve heard, and I think we’ve all heard this, that we all deserve to die. Okay, that’s one vantage point, and I’m not going to get into that. When you look at it from the standpoint of Mosaic law, we all should have been finished. There’s also a perspective where some people think, “Well I deserve to get everything I want.” We have to have reason, here, too. We have to have a balance. What are we willing to go after. Put it in the perspective of “Okay, we have boundaries within Christ.” We have to understand that we have to fear God and keep His commandments. This is our whole duty. It’s not grievous; the Bible talks about, in First John, “...we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.” (1 John 5:3) Now, the world is going to try have us *think* that, “Oh, it’s impossible to live like that,” or, “You don’t want to live like that,” or, “I can’t get away with what I want to...” Then you have to look at it like, “What am I really trying to get away with?” The Bible talks about, “Surely our sins shall find us out.” (Numbers 32:23) One we understand that we have to connect the Old and New Testament; it’s not just Grace. Yes, I understand that Grace is very important, but we also have to understand that there’s a connection between the Old and the New. Sometimes we have to ask those kinds of questions to help get us back to reality and gain an understanding of what God expects from us. God does have an expectation. It is, after all, a two-way relationship. I would say that, when someone doesn’t have a full understanding—and it’s not like we know it all; the Bible says that the secret things belong to God, but the things that are revealed are enough that we can know the law and do it (Deuteronomy 29:29), so we have an understanding of God to establish a path—it’s clear. I understand that it’s a walk in faith, and without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6).

***Jeremiah 29:11-13*** *For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.*

One thing for sure is that we don’t find the truth of God by accident. It takes searching. Now, I understand that there’s a lot of children here whose parents sought God and found the truth. Really they (the children) don’t have an understanding, yet of what God has for them. They have an experience with God, but, you take a child of three or five (whatever—I’m just picking a number), they don’t have an understanding. I look back in my own life, I didn’t know what God had for my life. I remember a point in time where I did say prayers, but, it was like, “I’ll just say them as fast as I can,” as though that were my duty. It was like, “Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep...” You know. I would pray, “Bless everybody in the world. Thank You, God for everything. God bless America.” Hey, I’m not saying it as right or wrong, but, knowing what I know now, I better have a little more sincere, dedicated, real, prayer with God. I know that God wants us to be thankful, but it’s not a matter of groveling. We’ve all heard what a lap dog is: it’s basically something where—we’ve even heard the expression used as it pertains to somebody that just like no matter what--and God’s not looking for that. God’s not looking for that. God doesn’t want us to be just like robots. He wants us to be free moral agents; Pastor Paine, our bishop, has shared that on a number of occasions, and I appreciate that. We do have an option but, then, we do have to look at it like what’s in our best interest? To seek God, to have an understanding, to know that we do have an expected end. I will say this much, especially when dealing with tribulation—and I’m going to get into that a little bit later, as well—we’re aware of what’s happened in the Philippines, and this isn’t the first catastrophic tragedy that we’ve had. You just think back a couple of years ago, the earthquake that hit in Haiti, 9-11 was a pretty major event, and these things happen. I think sometimes people look at it like—Rob, you mentioned it, how that sometimes people want to blame God,

“It’s God’s fault.” Okay, how about when something good happens for that person, or for us? It’s something just to say, “Are people just attacking God when there’s a problem? when there’s tragedy?” What if people were to thank God? I’ll use this example: we look at the Book of Job, and it talks about how he was a man who was perfect and eschewed evil and feared God. then all these events befell him. There is one key verse, “In all this, Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.” (Job 1:22) that point right there, that whatever we’re going through, we can’t charge God foolishly—we can, but it wouldn’t be right. We have to look at an example like that—and Gods not going to put all of us through those kind of experiences. There’s times when I feel pretty fortunate. I’ve had misfortune; I think we all have, to some degree, but, I think sometimes we get to thinking, “I don’t want to jinx myself.” I was talking to my manager recently—and I thank God for the job that I have, but there’s some people here that—Alma, you mentioned it—some people struggle, trying to find a job, and that’s something that we need to keep in prayer for her. It’s not an easy economy, and, to a great extent it seems like what’s happening in America is like what happened in the Great Depression—It’s just one of those things, and, when I was talking to my manager, I just said, “You know, I realize that the bottom could fall out tomorrow, but I want to say that, if I were to rank it on a scale of one to ten, all things considered: education, location, pay, everything considered, I would give it a 10.” I told him—and he’s been around a lot, I mean, he’s a good guy—and he said, “I hear what you’re saying.” When we thank God, not just for the physical things, but we’re talking about spiritual matters as well—thank Him for a spiritual healing; thank Him for the love that He’s given us; thank Him for the ability to forgive; because those are the things that are going to save us. Those are the things that are going to keep us going. Yes, I think it’s important to be thankful for a car to drive, a place to live, food to eat, things like that; TastyKakes...

I have to say, this was a couple of weeks ago—I do some travelling—I got this job, south of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and it was called Tasty Baking Company. As I was getting closer, I was thinking to myself, is this TastyKakes? I got up to the door, and lo-and-behold! “I’ve got to text Parrish!” This guy preaches about TastyKakes, and he said, “Why can’t I ever get a job like that?” I told him, “I’ll get what I can for you.” It’s just little things like that, I think, liven things up. We do have struggles; we do have hardships. That’s a given. That’s something that we know about going in. You look at the life of Christ...

**Matthew 6:25-26** *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? 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?*

That’s something that—Ken, I think you mentioned in the prayer meeting, Friday night, that God takes care of the fowls of the air. It’s one thing to have worry—and we’re going to get into that in a minute—but, I appreciate that prayer, and I appreciate the things that were shared, and the sincerity, that we aren’t just thankful ofr the physical things, but it is something to be thankful.

**Matthew 6:27-34** *Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 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? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the*

*morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.*

So, these are a lot of things to be thankful for and not just this time of year, and not just things that are in the physical, the things that have manifested themselves. I know that we all have concerns, we all have worries, that's something that I personally fight, whether it's a mortgage, or keeping my job, or inflation, or terrorism, or whatever problem comes down the pike, because there's plenty of them. But, on the other end of the scale, we can't be so care-free and think that, "I don't have any responsibility." We have to have that balance. We have to understand that there are bills to pay, there is an order, there is a structure, there is a society that we're trying to have... I'm not saying don't have a plan; this isn't talking about, "Don't have a plan," or, "Don't prepare for the proverbial rainy day." We don't want to wind up in the boat of being unthankful.

**2 Timothy 3:1-5** *This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.*

So, we look at that and there are a lot of characteristics that we don't want to have. You could probably have a study on each one of those (which we're not going to, by the way). The point is, you look at the unthankful, and it's included in with these other works of the flesh. It's something that we want to avoid. We've all had missed opportunities in life, things we wish had gone better, or things that we'd like to take back. Some chances we wish we would have taken and maybe others not so much. Hindsight is 20/20 and if we knew now what we do it could change everything, right? That's a place where God doesn't want us to live, though, in regret. We can't change the past. Paul talked about, "...forgetting those things which are behind... I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:13-14) I think, a lot of times, when we get to places in our lives when we are able to evaluate, to examine ourselves, to look at what we've got, to look at what we've missed, to look at, maybe, where we've scored, to look at where we've failed... There is still a lot to be thankful for. There's probably not anybody who's going to get—the Bible talks about, "**For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?**" (Mark 8:35) and Christ talks about that, but He knows good and well there's no such thing as gaining the whole world. I don't care who the richest person is (I know Carlos Slim and Bill Gates are pretty high up there, Michael Dell...) You hear about these things in Fortune magazine and on Yahoo—this guy's got sixty billion and this guy's the richest—okay. Would I want to change shoes with them? If they're not in the faith (and I'm not saying that they are or they're not), I look at it like—and this is certainly not a criticism; there's a girl that I went to high school with, who ended up marrying the guy who founded Yankee Candle. Anybody here ever hear of Yankee Candle? She ended up marrying the guy—he had sold the company back in 1999 for \$450 million. He came with her to our high school reunion a few years back, and I got to talking to him—he's friendly guy and whatnot... I heard, the last time I was home, that he'd actually had a stroke—now he's a little bit older, I think early sixties by now, or maybe late fifties, but—I guess I look at it like, would I exchange shoes with anybody that's accumulated a vast amount of wealth without knowing God? Because that's the caveat; you have to look at it like, okay—because there's plenty of us, and we've come from a lot of

different backgrounds, and we live at a lot of different levels of society, but that's good. That's what God is expecting—He's not looking for a bunch of clones.

Now, I'm going to ask this question: if you've come here today (and I certainly hope that nobody has) and are adamantly opposed to giving God thanks (I would have to say you're probably sitting in the wrong place) but I would say this much, sometimes people have it set in their heart that that's what they're going to do, that's what they're going to be, they've dug their heels into the sand; dynamite can't move them. We could sit there and say, "You've got to be thankful for this, and that, and what about the rest of life," and on and on and on, and it's, "Okay, yeah, shut up." After a while, it's like, "Okay." I'm not saying that our testimony would be in vain, but it's a matter of looking at it like, again, I want to touch on this because it's like, being thankful in the midst of tragedy; that's the hardest part. Being thankful, in the midst of being unemployed—Alma, I know you mentioned that—that's a hard thing. Being thankful—I've heard Pastor Paine, our bishop, share this—what about when a parent loses a child? I mean, I don't have children, but that is probably the most heart-wrenching thing that I could possibly imagine. My heart goes out to parents like that. Really, a child should never precede a parent in death, but it happens. Rob, touching again on what you said about people holding on to anger; for what? Ultimately, what's really fair—we touched on this a little bit last month—what's fair is that God said, "The Grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men." (Titus 2:11) That's as fair as it's going to get. When we hear that truth, if it all goes downhill from there (which it doesn't, but Satan likes to make us think like it does) "Oh, once I got saved, then everything was a problem." I don't agree with that, but Satan's going to try to get us to think like, "Oh, I never had problems like this before, and it's the church and the pastor..." After a while, it's like "Man up a little bit!" or "Woman up a little bit!" I mean, truthfully! If you've come here today and are already thankful, and I believe that's all of us, then keep on keeping on. If you've come here today and are straddling the fence a little bit, or maybe aren't too sure or aren't too convinced—and I realize that we can't get into somebody's mind and, you know, pry it out of people, "You've got tell me!" hold them hostage, or interrogation, or something like that—I don't have enough stories, Malcolm doesn't have enough stories, Bob... to convince people, but it's what we have to have. Being thankful is something that's very important. If you're straddling the fence, I will say this: Let the Holy Spirit get ahold of your heart; let the Holy Spirit minister to you personally. I know full well that I wasn't raised as a Christian. We went to church sometimes, but, I know that when I was at a point when I was really trying to seek for answers, and I didn't have any idea what that answer might be; I remember sitting out in my backyard—this was a cold night—there was just this spirit of depression that was starting to settle, and I was just thinking, "What is the answer? What is the purpose of life? What am I supposed to look for, not just to gain happiness, but joy?" To be thankful, undeniable, unforgettable, the Spirit of God came into me, personally. That was a personal thing and that was one of the first times. I knew right then I needed to find this. I knew at that point that there was more to it. I knew at that point, "I need to find out what does the Word of God teach?" I knew it was Jesus Christ; I'll tell you that much. We have to be willing to receive that; we have to be willing, even to weigh up all of our options. Weigh up your options, and, whoever God is, let's just say God will be nameless at this point—if that's where you are in your life—still let God speak to you. The Word of God—the Bible talks about His sheep know His voice, and a stranger they will not follow (John 10:1-5)

**Psalm 103:1-11**      *Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's. The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed. He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel. The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor*

*rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.*

I want to say one more thing with regard to thankfulness: We go through days and weeks, as we go through time, I think a lot of times the mindset is of suppressing, whether it's anger, whether it's unthankfulness, whether it's—just go down the list of what we read earlier. I want to say that God's not asking us to suppress, He's asking us to give it to Him. There is a difference; if we suppress it, eventually, you're going to explode. I mean, it's going to be ugly. It's going to be one of those things where it's like, "Where did that come from?" We've all heard that expression where it's like, "Hey! It just happened like a volcanic eruption!" I'm embarrassed to say that I've had that happen—I'm not talking about sin unto death; I'm talking about, "What in the world? Why did I bottle it up for so long, instead of just giving it to God in the first place?" I've said this before and I'll say it again. I remember vividly about 20 years ago I was driving one night in Waukegan, and God spoke to me. Some people say, "Oh, I can't believe that! God speaks to people?" Yes, yes, He does. If anybody on the outside wants to deny it, or accept it, it doesn't really matter, because the same people that say, "Oh, there isn't a God. We evolved from this..." Let them think that. "Okay, that's where you came from; I know I was made by God." Then they're looking at it like, "No, no! You did too!" because, I think, the biggest thing is that they just want us to give it up, "You're right, you're right; I evolved. I was an amoeba, and then a salamander and then a steak, and a lizard..." or whatever. It's sort of comical, but, getting back to the driving down the road... But that still, small voice of God spoke just loudly enough for me to hear, "If you remain thankful, you'll never go wrong." That doesn't mean that I'll never make mistakes. There's a series that they did in Norfolk over the past summer that Pastor Paine and Pastor Ulysse were teaching on eldership. One of the sermons that Pastor Ulysse gave was on being blameless. He said, "Being blameless is not being sinless." I appreciate that, because there was a discernment, there was an understanding conveyed, that I learned something. Again, it's not like, "If you remain thankful, you'll never go wrong." Okay, that's it, everything's perfect, you've got it all wrapped up. Have I done things that I regret since then? yeah. Again, I mean, not regret forever; I mentioned earlier, we don't want to live in regret, and God doesn't want us to live there either. But I haven't given up on Jesus and I know that I'm that much nearer than when I first believed.

You know that sometimes the most thankful and grateful people are those who don't appear to have a whole lot; they don't have a huge arsenal of possessions. I'm not against it. I'm not looking at it like, as a homeowner, we're going to accumulate some tools and things... God's saying, if you have fun, keep it in the right perspective. There is such a thing as godly fun. We're not here like a bunch of stiffs. I would say that we have to have the right balance. The world even tries to convince people like them that they have nothing, and yet as Apostle Paul stated, "As having nothing, yet possessing all things." (2 Corinthians 6:10)

So what's our legacy of thanks? And by the way, that's the title of the message today, "Legacy of Thanks." Thought I'd go from the back to the front for a change. Will we be remembered for whatsoever state we were in that we were thankful and content? That we gave thanks to God in all things? That we loved our neighbor as ourselves? For thanking God for the little things? For being one of the ones, Parrish, that did give thanks for the healing or whatever that we've received? We're all recipients of God's benefits. It's not as though—and I reference that a lot, because I think, "That's fair!"—the Grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men... If that's as fair as it gets, that seems pretty fair to me. God aid, "Okay, here's your opportunity," to be born again, to be baptized in His name, to know His truth, to have a walk with God, to have our names written in the Lamb's Book of Life, and, like it talked about in the Book of Revelation, "I will wipe away all tears from their eyes, neither shall the former things be remembered." (Revelation 21:4) That's where we have to be in tragedy, and also in good times. Being thankful to God, and, again, I'm not saying like especially when a child precedes it's parents—and that's a very somber awareness in reality; I mean, it breaks my heart—Zena, that book that you let me read several years ago, it talks about abortion, and what that has done for this country. It's an atrocity. I'm just going to say it like that. Are we thankful for that? No, I'm not

thankful. God's not asking us to be. God's asking us to be thankful in the big picture. He asks us to be thankful for knowing the Word, and for the breath of life. To have a legacy of thanks.

I want to thank you for your time. God bless you all.

I want to just say something: I know that I touched on a politically challenging topic of abortion, and I want to say this: God really dealt with me just now; it's something that—we don't always know everybody's situation, but, it's something that d can forgive, and God can give a healing. It's something that, it's a very sad reality, but I know that we've had people in our ministry that have and it's something that they have regretted, but God is a healer, and God can forgive. I just wanted to come back and share that. God bless you.

