

A Believer's Thankfulness For Faith

In the US we set aside one day as Thanksgiving Day in November. When you ask someone what they are thankful for, they will often answer – family, friends, a roof over my head, food on the table, a job, health, etc. The American Thanksgiving holiday celebration was started in thanks to God for the harvest of the land. Some of your evangelical churches also set aside a special time to give gratitude to God for this reason. We should all thank God for the many blessings that we have received from God.

But a believer has much more to be thankful for – their faith. As our text we use:

- **Col. 1:12-14**, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.
- For that (our Faith) we are to be thankful to God

We should be thankful as believers. If you are now a Christian, I hope this morning's message will strengthen your faith and renew your reasons to be thankful. If you are not a Christian, I hope this message will challenge you to consider the Truth of Christianity and to accept Christ as your personal Lord and Savior. First some background information.

What is Thankfulness?

- Expression of giving thanks
- The natural man is unthankful
- **Rom. 1:21**, For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.
- **2 Tim. 3:2**, For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy,
- Only by the grace of God do we express thankfulness
- **1 Th. 5:16-18**, Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.
- We are to be thankful for our Faith
- The word "thankful" is used 195 times in the NT

What is Faith?

- [Dictionary] Trust in a person or thing, Belief in God, Belief in doctrines
- The atheist will say that our faith is blind – based on wishful thinking
- But I will demonstrate that our faith is indeed evidence-based
- **Heb. 1:1-2**, Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

- **Heb. 11:1-3**, Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.
- **Rom. 1:20**, For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

What is the Basis For Our Faith?

- How do we know that our faith is real?
- Faith based on God's Word, God's Work, God's moral law (conscience)
- God's Word – Scripture, the basis for our faith
- God's Work – Creation, the evidence of our faith
- Jesus is the object of our faith
- Witnesses to our faith – past and present
- **Heb. 12:1**, Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

As believers we should be thankful for these three things regarding our faith:

1. Events recorded in the past
2. Evidence for these events in the present
3. Effects of the events in the past, present, and future.

1. Thankful For the Events of the Past

- The Bible records events of the past, from the time of Creation to the time of Christ, the Apostles and the early church
- The Bible consists of 66 books
 - 39 in the OT
 - 27 in the NT
- Written by 40 different authors
- Written over a period of ~1500 years
- All tell one consistent story
- We can describe the events of the past in terms of the 7 C's of History:
 1. Creation (The Beginning)
 2. Corruption (The Fall)
 3. Catastrophe (The Flood)
 4. Confusion (Tower of Babel)
 5. Christ (First Coming)
 6. Cross (Redemption)
 7. Consummation (Second Coming of Christ)

Creation

- Recorded in first 11 chapters of **Genesis**

- God's completed creation was "very good", **Gen. 1:31**
- Referenced by OT writers
- Referenced by NT writers, including the Apostles and Christ

Corruption (The Fall)

- **Gen. 3:6**, Adam chose to rebel, eating the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil
- Adam's sin ushered in death, sickness and sorrow into the once-perfect creation
- **Rom. 5:12**, "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned."

Catastrophe (The Flood)

- God judged their sin by sending a global Flood to destroy all men, animals, creeping things, birds of the air. **Gen. 6:7**
- **Gen. 6-8** provides a record of the global Flood
- This catastrophe left its mark even today
- **Gen. 8:17**, God commanded Noah and his family and the animals to fill the earth

Confusion (Tower of Babel)

- **Gen. 11:3-4**, "Then they said to one another, 'Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly.' They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. And they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.'"
- **Gen. 11:8**, "So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city."
- God confused their language so that they could not understand each other
- The people were scattered all over the earth
- All the tribes and nations are descended from them

Christ (First Coming)

- Recorded in the Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, John
- Our salvation comes through Christ, the Creator God
- Christ stepped into history to become a man who would do what the first Adam did not do
- Christ lived a perfect life in obedience to the Father
- **1 Cor. 15:45-49**, "And so it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being.' The last Adam became a life-giving spirit."

Cross (Crucifixion)

- Christ was the Redeemer who had been promised 4,000 years earlier
- He came to save the world from sin by dying on the cross and rising three days later, paying the death penalty for those who receive His free gift of eternal life
- **Rom. 6:23**, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Consummation (Second Coming of Christ)

- Believers look forward to the consummation of all things in the future
- Jesus will return to take back the earth and establish His kingdom
- **Rev. 19:11**, Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war.

Events of the past, as recalled and confirmed by Stephen in **Acts 7**

- Stephen was accused of blasphemy against Moses and God
- **Acts 7:1-60**, Stephen defends himself against his accusers in front of the high priest
- Stephen recounts important historical events
- The Abrahamic Covenant introduced in **Gen. 12:1-3**, made in **Gen. 15:18-21** and reaffirmed in **Gen. 17:1-21**, renewed with Isaac in **Gen. 26:2-5** and Jacob in **Gen. 28:10-17**
- Abraham -> Isaac -> Jacob, **Acts 7:8**
- Murdered Christ, the Just One, **7:52-53**
- Stephen sees the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God, **Acts 7:56**.

Events of the past, as preached and confirmed by Paul in the synagogue in Antioch, **Acts 13:16-41**

- God chose Israel, **13:17**
- Israelites dwelt in Egypt, **13:17**
- God brought Israel out of Egypt
- **Acts 13:28**, “And though they found no cause for death in Him, they asked Pilate that He should be put to death.”
- **Acts 13:29**, “Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb.”
- **Acts 13:30**, “But God raised Him from the dead.”
- Prophecies fulfilled in Christ – begotten Son – **Ps. 2:7; Is. 53**, etc.
- As described in **Acts 13:33-41**

- There are many events recorded in the Bible
- We have covered only some of the highlights

2. Evidence for the Events of the Past

- But if these events were not real, i.e. they did not happen, our faith has no basis, i.e. no substance
- How do we know that these past events are real?
- What evidence do we have?
- In the time that we have, I want to give you some of this evidence

2.1 Internal consistency of the books

- The 66 Books of the Bible were written over a 1500 year time span
- Written by 40 different authors in different cultures, in three continents (Asia, Africa, Europe), and three languages (Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic)
- Contains outstanding consistency in its message
- He revealed Himself to the patriarchs, then to the nation of Israel
- God worked out His plan in Christ, in His disciples, and in the church
- The last book, Revelation, tells how God will complete His plan
- The unity of the Bible points to its supernatural origin
- **2 Pet. 1:21**, “Prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”
- **2 Tim. 3:16**, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.”
- The OT uses such phrases as “And God spoke to Moses,” “the word of the Lord came unto Jonah,” and “God said” more than 2000 times
- The Bible has but one author – God
- The Scriptures contain indisputable evidence as being the Word of God
 - **John 14:6**, “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’”
 - **John 5:39**, “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.”
 - **John 5:46**, “For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me.”
- That is why the Bible is so consistent and reliable from start to finish:
 - The OT is the preparation, **Is. 40:3**, speaks of the forerunner of the Messiah
 - The gospels are the manifestation, **John 1:29**, “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’”
 - The Book of Acts is the propagation, **Acts 1:8**, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”
 - The Epistles give the explanation, **Col. 1:27**, “To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”
 - The Book of Revelation is the consummation, **Rev. 1:7**, “Behold, He is coming with clouds and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.”
- The Bible is all about Jesus Christ

2.2 Manuscript evidence

- How early are the manuscripts compared to when the originals were written?

- How close are the copies of the manuscripts to the content of the originals?
- Over 24,000 manuscripts of the New Testament books discovered
 - Written in various languages
 - 5500 mostly complete NT written in the original Greek
 - The books of the NT were written 50-95 AD
 - Early copies dated to about 125 AD
- Only 8 copies of the works of Herodotus, written 100-44 BC
 - Earliest copies dated to about 1200 AD
- If you believe in the existence and writings of Herodotus, how can you not believe in the writings of the OT and NT writers?

2.3 Archaeology

- One hundred years ago, many Bible critics tried to dismiss much of the Bible's history as the work of creative storytellers, e.g. existence of the Hittites
- In the 1900's archaeological finds have overwhelmingly supported the biblical data
- A recent study of ancient Jericho concluded that the walls of Jericho did tumble down as the Bible indicates – Archaeologist Bryant G. Wood
- Sir William Ramsay, a noted archaeologist, tried to prove that the book of Acts was inaccurate – came away as an ardent believer in its great historical value: “Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy; he is possessed of the true historic sense ... In short, this author should be placed along with the greatest of historians.”
- Dead Sea Scrolls found in the Qumran caves in 1947 by a shepherd
 - Found an Isaiah manuscript, dated to ~125 BC, matched today's copy
 - Copies of all books of the OT (except Esther) found, dated to first century AD
 - Previous manuscripts dated to 900 AD
- Ebla tablets discovered in Northern Syria in 1964
 - Ebla was at the height of its power in 2300 BC
 - Names of 5000+ cities mentioned
 - Includes names of many biblical cities such as Sodom, Gomorrah, Salem, Gaza, Ashdod, etc.
 - Verifies that writing was used well before the time of Moses
- Rylands Fragment with a portion of John 18 was found in Egypt and dated ~125 AD
 - Supports the view that the last gospel to be written had already been in circulation for many years
- “It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference.” – **Glueck**, a Jewish archaeologist

2.4 Accuracy in Science

- We trust the Bible for spiritual truth
- Do we trust it for truth in science?
- There are many biblical references to nature and natural processes
- The Bible is not a science textbook
- Authors use everyday language
- Amazingly accurate
- Anticipatory scientific insights in the Bible
- When the Bible does speak directly about matters of science (biology, geology, hydrology, physics, astronomy, etc.), it speaks correctly
- **Gen. 9:4**, But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.
 - Life is in the blood, a medical statement
 - Blood circulatory system, and importance of blood to life, was scientifically discovered by William Harvey in 1616 AD
- **Gen. 17:12**, He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring,
 - Baby's immune system is at its peak on 8th day
 - Medical discovery of the late 19th century
- Compare this to the accuracy of other "religious" books when it comes to accuracy on matters pertaining to science:
 - The Vedas (Hindu scriptures) teach that
 - "The moon is ~ 150,000 miles higher than the sun and shines with its own light
 - The earth is flat and triangular
 - Earthquakes are caused by elephants shaking themselves under it"
 - Ptolemy suggested that the earth was at the center of the universe
- The very origin of modern science rests on the truth of the Scripture

2.5 History

- The events of the OT and NT were recorded by eyewitnesses for the most
- **Luke 1:1-4**, "Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed."
- **1 John 1:1**, "What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life."
- Josephus, the Jewish historian, born in 37 AD, records the existence of Jesus, "Now there was about his time, Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works – a teacher of such

men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles.”

- Tacitus, a Roman historian, in AD 112, writing about the reign of Nero, refers to Jesus Christ and the existence of Christians in Rome
- Seutonius, a Roman historian, in AD 120, made many references to Jesus and His followers in his various historical writings

2.6 Geography

- The places mentioned in the Bible are real historical places
- These places still exist today, many with the same name
- Jerusalem, Syria, Damascus, Egypt, Babylon
- The Nile, Euphrates, Tiger rivers
- The mountains of Ararat
- Mount Sinai, Mount of Olives, etc.

2.7 ~500 (of ~1000 total) Prophecies in the Bible already fulfilled

- The reliability of the Bible is confirmed by the accuracy of its prophecies
- **Deut. 18:20-22** – the test of a prophet’s authority is the accuracy of his predictions
- Many OT prophecies are fulfilled in the NT, especially those concerning Jesus Christ (~100 of ~300), e.g. **Isaiah 52:13 -> 53:12** and **Ps. 22**

<u>OT Verse</u>	<u>Prophecy</u>	<u>NT Verse</u>
Is. 7:14	Born of a virgin	Lk. 1:26-35
Mic. 5:2	Born in Bethlehem	Mt. 2:1
Is. 7:14	Called Immanuel	Mt. 1:23
Is. 9:1-2	Ministry in Galilee	Mt. 4:12-16
Zech. 9:9	Triumphal entry	Mt. 21:1-11
Ps. 41:9	Betrayed by a friend	Mt. 26:20-25
Ps. 35:11	Falsely accused	Mt. 27:12-14
Is. 53:12	Crucified with robbers	Mt. 27:38
Ps. 22:15	Thirsted on the cross	John 19:28

- **Ezek. 26** – destruction of the city of Tyre predicted in Ezekiel hundreds of years before it happened
 - City would be destroyed
 - Ruins would be scraped off and dumped into the sea
 - Never to be rebuilt
 - First Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the city
 - Then Alexander the Great had his men use the ruins to build a causeway out to an offshore island where the people had fled
 - The causeway still exists today
- Whenever the Bible speaks prophetically, it is accurate
- Thus we can also believe what the Bible has to say about things to come

2.8 The Uniqueness of the Bible

- Alone among religious books in its scientific accuracy
- Other ancient religious books abound in obvious scientific errors, e.g. Hindu, Greek, Muslim, Babylonian, Mormon sacred books
- The Bible is in accord with archaeology, history, geography and science
- No superstitions have corrupted the Bible, e.g.
 - Astronomy -> astrology
 - Chemistry -> alchemy
- No other ancient “religious” book has this accuracy
- No other ancient “religious” book could withstand this scrutiny

3. Effects of the Events of the Past

- But even if the Bible is true, and it can be verified, but has not had and does not have any impact on people’s lives, it is of no value
- If people do not believe the Truth, and live by the Truth and for the Truth, the events of the past are of no consequence
- Have we seen an impact on people’s lives in the past?
- What was the impact of Christ on the Apostles?
- What impact is the Truth having today?
- Do we see changed lives today?
- The Bible is called the “word of life” in **Phil. 2:16**
- Its message is the gospel, “the power of God to salvation” in **Rom. 1:16**
- It refers to itself as the “living and powerful” Word of God in **Heb. 4:12**

3.1 Changed Lives of Biblical Characters

The NT tells us about people whose lives were transformed by their relationship with Christ. Some of the important examples that we see include:

1. Zacchaeus, the tax collector, **Luke 19:1-10**, “... For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”
2. Nicodemus, a religious leader, **John 3:1-22**, “... Jesus answered, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.’
John 19:39, “And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds.”
3. An immoral woman at the well, **John 4:1-26**
4. A blind man healed by Jesus, **John 9**
5. The twelve disciples
6. 3000 souls added in one day, **Acts 2:41**
7. An Ethiopian official to whom Phillip preached Jesus, **Acts 8:26-40**
8. Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus, **Acts 9**
9. Cornelius, a centurion from Italy, **Acts 10**

10. The Philippian jailer, **Acts 16:25-35**, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.” The testimony of Paul and Silas in jail

3.2 Martyrdom of the apostles

- Ten of the apostles were martyred, only John died a natural death after a long exile
- If Jesus was not who He said He was, why would they die for Him?
- Would you die for a lie?

3.3 Changed lives of people throughout history

- Polycarp, a disciple of the Apostle John, martyred at 86 years of age
- Augustine, brilliant scholar of 4th and 5th centuries, transformed from a drunkard to the bishop of Hippo in northern Africa
 - Could not find peace
 - Prayed for by a godly mother
 - **Rom. 13:13-14**, “Let us walk properly as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in licentiousness and lewdness, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts”
 - Founded first monastery in northern Africa
 - Influenced much of Christian thought by his brilliant writing

3.4 Changed lives of people today

- Martin Luther sparked the Protestant Reformation
- John Newton, slave trader, came to Christ
- Wilberforce abolished slavery in England after a long battle
- Charles Spurgeon, influential London pastor of the late 1800's
- Chuck Colson, convicted Watergate conspirator in 1975
 - Founded Prison Fellowship in 1976
 - Ministering to those without hope
- How do you explain the forgiveness of the Amish people for the recent killing of five Amish school girls?
- Changed lives because of:
 - The work of the indwelling Holy Spirit in our lives
 - The evidence for the reality of God's existence
 - His clear presence in the lives of men and women today
 - E.g. The story in “Through The Valley of the Kwai”, prisoners reduced to almost animals
 - Started to read the NT
 - Gordon, a skeptic leads the reading
 - Many were unbelievers
 - Prisoners transformed into a community of love
 - Demonstrates the reality of God in Jesus Christ

- Convincing evidence from Creation, History, contemporary life – there is a God and that this God can be known in one’s personal experience
- What impact has Jesus Christ had on your life?
 - Believers – what evidence do you give of Christ’s impact on your life?
 - Unbelievers – what more do you need to make a decision for Christ?

3.5 Eternal Life

- The promise of His Word
- The hope of the believer

4. Why We Should Be Thankful

As believers, we have much to be thankful for, especially our faith. We remember 1) the events of the past, 2) the many faithful witnesses of the past and today, 3) the supporting evidence of these events, 4) the effects of the events of the past, and 5) the promises and hope that we have for the future. Let us remember all this and give thanks to the Lord.

God welcomes thankful people into his presence:

- **Ps. 100:4**, Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!

God deserves your thanks:

- **Ps. 107:1**, Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!
- **2 Cor. 9:15**, Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

God’s Word commands Christians to be thankful:

- **Col. 3:15**, And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.
- **Col. 3:17**, And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Faith and Thanksgiving go together:

- **Col. 2:6-7**, Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.
- **1 Th. 5:18**, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

As believers we are to be thankful to God for our Faith. Gratitude is a mark of maturity. You cannot be happy without being thankful; you cannot be thankful without being happy. So be thankful for both your physical and spiritual blessings from God. Don’t take your faith for granted!