TITLE: Learning Gratitude

TEXT: Phil. 4:11-13; Col. 3:15-16; 1 Co. 15:31;

James 1:22-25; 1 Thess. 5:16-18; Jn. 11:41-43

INTRODUCTION: How about you this morning, do you think that gratitude is something that has to be learned? Or is gratitude something that just comes naturally to us?

Have you ever thought about what life was like for your grandparents or great-grandparents?

If you have, you would probably agree with something that Gregg Easterbrook of the Bookings Institute once said. He said that our ancestors would concede the world that we live in today to be a kind of utopia.

Think back to the early days of our country when people first started to move from the eastern to the western part of America.

The first settlers to the American west would travel for months to get to where we can now go in days by car or mere hours by air.

In their journey’s many would perish because of the harsh elements and other dangers they were exposed to along the way and never reach their intended destination, while many today will fly 1st class, sitting back in a comfortable seat being served food and drink along the way.

In a time not all that long ago most men would work 12-16 hour days- six or more days a week and not make a fraction of what the average American worker will make today working an 8 hour 5 day work week with 2-6 weeks of paid vacation per year.

In his book; The Progress Paradox: How Life gets Better While People Feel Worse, Easterbrook says the average westerner lives better than 99.4 percent of all of the human beings that have ever lived.

Life expectancy has nearly doubled in the past century alone and continues to increase.

Real per capita income has doubled since 1960.

In the period following WW-2, the average new American home was eleven hundred square feet; today the average new American home is twenty three hundred square feet.

For most of our history the average home had one room for every two people, today there are two rooms for every one person on average.

By any measure of affluence—Income, health care, leisure, technology—the average American enjoys a quality of life far beyond anyone’s wildest dreams even a few decades ago.

The most impoverished and poor of America would be seen as wealthy in comparison to over two thirds of our world’s population today.

Yet, all of the progress that we enjoy hasn’t made Americans any happier. In fact just the opposite seems to be true---it has seemed to make us more unhappy!

The percentage of Americans who characterize themselves as “happy” hasn’t changed since the 1950’s, and the percentage of those describing themselves as “very happy” is down and continues to decline with every passing year.

The percentage of Americans and Europeans who suffer a bout with depression has climbed to 25 percent of the population and shows no signs of abating.

An estimated 7 percent of all Americans suffer at least one incident of major, debilitating depression a year..

For some people, depression is the product of genetics and other biological factors. But for many others, being depressed in the midst of such unprecedented prosperity can be traced to spiritual, cultural, and moral factors. For the former medical treatment is indicated. For the latter, what is needed is a change in worldview or a change in heart.

And a good place to start is with a sense of gratitude.

The Roman orator Cicero called gratitude not only the “greatest of virtues” but “the parent of all others”!

Similarly, the philosopher Immanuel Kant called ingratitude the “essence of vileness.” And I think that this is especially true for ingratitude on the part of a Christian. That it can become the essence of vileness in our lives.

So, is gratitude something that just comes natural to us or is it something that we need to learn?

I believe that often it is something we need to learn.

I think that is what the apostle Paul is saying in:

**Philippians 4:11 - 13 (NIV)** **11 I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.** **12I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.** **13I can do everything through him who gives me strength.**

How it is that Paul could find contentment in every and all situations?

He said that he learned it!

**I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.**

**I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.**

Paul’s contentment was a learned characteristic..

And real contentment is not dependent upon circumstances but it is a condition of the heart.

**I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.**

I think that contentment and gratitude go hand in hand.

In order to be grateful one must first learn to be content.

Show me someone who is non-content in life and I will show you someone who, for the most part is ungrateful as well.

If someone is not content then they will probably not be grateful either. The two really do go hand in hand!

Paul said: **I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.**

**I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation!**

Paul learned the art of contentment and it was through that contentment that opened his heart to gratitude.

**Colossians 3:15 - 16 (NIV)** **15Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.  16Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.**

The word thankful and the word grateful often come from the same Greek word.

**charis; a prim. word; *grace,* gracious, gratitude (1), thankfulness (2), thanksgiving**

So how does one learn to be thankful or grateful?

Scripture gives us two suggestions here..

#1. **15Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,**

#**2 16Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly --- with gratitude in your hearts to God**

We need to #1. **15Let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts!**

We need to let, allow! This is an action on our part.

We need to allow **the peace of Christ rule in our hearts.**

The word we get rule from here is:

***brab-yoo'-o*;**

**to *arbitrate*, that is, to *govern,* *prevail*—rule.**

We need to let or allow the peace of Christ to govern or prevail in our hearts.

We do this through the act of surrender and the advocating of control of our lives to Christ, to allow Him to govern our life. Allow Him to prevail in our life.

When we really allow Jesus to govern or rule our life and our actions is when we will really experience His peace within our life.

This is not just speaking of initial salvation where we ask Christ to come into our hearts. If it were then every Christian would be grateful and content…

I have known Christians who were neither really content nor overwhelmed with gratitude or peace.

There has been times in my life as a Christian where I have not been content or nearly as grateful as I should be. Times when I have lacked Christ peace in my life.

These were things that Paul said that he had to learn.

Had they came automatically with salvation then he wouldn’t have had to learn them would he?

He had to allow the peace of Christ to rule in his heart.

This speaks of a constant and continual yielding and surrendering of one life to Christ. To daily take up ones cross and follow Jesus.

Paul says this in:  
**1 Corinthians 15:31 (NIV)** **31I die every day—I mean that, brothers—just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

To allow the peace of Christ to rule in our hearts will require our daily dying to self and surrendering our lives to Christ.

Likewise the way we find true contentment and gratitude is to

**16Let the word of Christ dwell in us richly ---with gratitude in our hearts to God!**

We need to let or allow the Word of Christ to dwell in us richly!

The word dwell comes from the Greek:

***en-oy-keh'-o***

**to *inhabit* —dwell in.**

It means to Let Christ Word take up residence within us.

#2 **16Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly …**

We need to let or allow the word of Christ to dwell in us richly!

Richly

***ploo-see'-oce***

***copiously:*—abundantly, richly!**

We need to daily be taking in and feeding upon our spiritual nourishment-- The word of God!

It is what King David was saying in:

**Psalms 119:11 (NIV) 11I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.**

To allow the Word of Christ to dwell within us richly is to take it in and literally hide it within our hearts.

We do that by reading it and studying it and meditating upon it. Then yielding our lives to its truth and instruction.

It is what Scripture admonishes us to do in:

**James 1:22 - 25 (NIV)** **22Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.** **23Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror** **24and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.** **25But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.**

Blessed how? Blessed by the peace and the presence of Christ that we have allowed into our lives through our act of surrender to His will and His Word!

It is only in this context that we will be able to live up to the admonition of God to us as Christians found in:

**1 Thessalonians 5:16 - 18 (NIV)** **16Be joyful always;** **17pray continually;** **18give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.**

Now one thing that we need to understand about this verse of Scripture is that it doesn’t say that we are to give thanks to God **for** all circumstances but that we are to give thanks to Him **in** all circumstances.

If you are going through a difficult time, a severe trail or tribulation it is only a sadist that will be thankful for that severe trial or tribulation in and of itself.

But as a Christian we can be very thankful to God within the trials or tribulations of this life as we see and experience His great grace and sufficiency to us as we go through them. As He helps us get through them.

We can be thankful that we can lean upon the promises of Christ such as when He said He would never leave us or forsake us!

There is a story about a ship that was wrecked, and the only survivor, a Christian, was washed up on a small uninhabited island.

He was exhausted. He cried out to God to save him. Every day he scanned the horizon, searching for help but none came.

Finally, he managed to build a hut and put the few possessions that he had in that hut.

Then one day, coming home from hunting for food, he was stung with grief to see a cloud of smoke and his little hut in flames. The worst thing that he could have imagined had happened. He didn’t have much but what he did have was destroyed in the fire.

But early the next day, a ship came in and rescued him.

He asked the crew, “How did you know I was here?”

They replied, “We saw your smoke signal.”

I am sure this man wasn’t thankful to God for the circumstance he found himself in by being shipwrecked alone on a deserted Island but he could be thankful within that circumstance as He witnessed the sufficiency and ultimate delivery of his God.

Maybe the difficulty we face now is the smoke signal that will ultimately lead to our greatest blessing and deliverance!

How we respond to the difficulties of this life will largely be determined by one thing and one thing alone and that is what it is that we have done with Jesus.

Have we allowed Him access and control over our lives or not…

Have we learned the secret of being content in each and every situation of life?

Have we Let, have we allowed the peace of Christ rule in our hearts, and have we  1Let and allowed the word of Christ dwell richly within us --with gratitude in our hearts to God?

One thing that stands out about the life of Christ was his gratitude.

There is a very revealing passage in the gospel of John.

Jesus had received the message that his friend Lazarus had died. Lazarus lived with his two sisters, Mary and Martha in the town of Bethany. Jesus goes to them and when he is standing before the tomb of his departed friend Jesus prays this prayer:

**John 11:41 - 43 (NIV)** **41So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me.** **42I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”** **43When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!”**

The sequence of events here has always seemed unusual to me.

Lazarus is still dead in the tomb and Jesus prayer of thanksgiving precedes the miracle of Lazarus rising.

It seems that thanks would only be lifted up once the miracle had been accomplished and Lazarus had been restored to life. But Jesus gave thanks for what he was about to receive.

His gratitude sprang forth before the blessing had arrived in an expression of assurance that it was on its way.

The song of victory had been sung before the battle had been fought.

What Jesus was illustrating to us here is that praise and thanksgiving are the vital preparation to releasing the power of God in one’s life and seeing the miraculous happen.

He was showing us that gratitude is to proceed and prepare the way for the miraculous in our life.

Is gratitude something that you have learned?

In your relationship with Christ are you

**joyful always; do you pray continually; and are you able to give thanks to God in all circumstances?**

This is Gods will for us in Christ Jesus!

Are we living within God’s will for our lives?

Are we living our lives in surrender and obedience to Him who gave His all for us?

Have we learned, are we learning how to be grateful?