TITLE: ARE YOU THANKFUL?

TEXT: Deut. 8:10; 1st Thess. 5:16-18; 2nd Co. 11:24-28; Acts 27:33-38; 2nd Co. 12:9-10; Dan. 3:16-18 & 27-29; HEB. 7:25 & 6:19

INTRODUCTION: Is everyone planning on having a good Thanksgiving this week? As I was starting to contemplate the menu for Thanksgiving dinner the other day and thinking how good everything was going to be, a verse of Scripture that came to mind was:

**Deut 8:10 (NIV) When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.**

When we have just eaten a tremendous meal and are sitting back full and satisfied it is not hard to thank God for His goodness and His blessings. And hopefully we all do that...

But often, it seems, it is only in those times, when we are full and satisfied with life, that we may think to stop and thank God...

The Apostle Paul has this to say to us about when we need to be thankful to God...

**1The 5:16 (NIV) Be joyful always;**

**17 pray continually;**

**18 give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.**

We are to give thanks to God, not only when we are full and satisfied with life, but we are to look for things that we can be thankful for in all of life's circumstances...Even in the trials and tribulations that we may have to face...

We may think, well that may be easy for Paul to say, he hasn't had to go through some of the things that I have had to go through in my life---And that maybe true but the opposite is also true ---We haven't had to face many of the things that Paul had to face in his life either...

Before we can accept what Paul is admonishing us to do here, to give thanks to God in all of life's circumstances, we may need to stop and take a quick look at the life that Paul lived while he was here....

Paul gives us part of his personal testimony in:

**2Cor 11:24 (NIV) Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.**

**25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea,**

**26 I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers.**

**27 I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.**

**28 Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.**

All of us have gone through trials and tribulations in this life...From the youngest here this morning to the oldest among us.

However, few, if any of us, have gone through the amount or severity of trial and tribulation that the Apostle Paul speaks of in these verses.

**Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.** (Same whipping that Jesus endured)

**Three times I was beaten with rods!**

( Not whipped behind the woodshed but literally beaten on by several people with big sticks)

**Once I was stoned!** (People with drug background may think-all right! Paul got stoned too!—NOT that kind of stoned! Stoning was a Death sentence where they threw rocks at you until you were dead)

**Three times I was shipwrecked!**

Acts Chapter 27 Tells in detail of one of Paul’s ship wreck experiences....

He is a Roman prisoner being sent to Rome to go before Caesar. They put him on a ship along with other Roman prisoners and start out for Rome.

Problem is that it is not the best time of year to take a cruise. It is approaching winter and the seas are very unpredictable.

They have problems with the weather from the get go but rather then pull into a safe harbor and winter there, as Paul advises, they keep on going... They run into a storm of hurricane proportions and find themselves caught and being carried along in the raging storm for over 14 days. They have all but given up on surviving! They have thrown everything of value overboard to try to lighten the ship and keep it from sinking. The sailors and prisoners have been so busy trying to stay afloat and are so upset that they haven't eaten sense the storm began...

**Acts 27:33 (NIV) Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat. "For the last fourteen days," he said, "you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food--you haven't eaten anything.**

**34 Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head."**

**35 After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat.**

**36 They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves.**

**37 Altogether there were 276 of us on board.**

**38 When they had eaten as much as they wanted, they lightened the ship by throwing the grain into the sea.**

By all outward appearances all these men were going to die! Perish at sea! And they knew it!

What is Paul’s response when he is going through this kind of adversity in his life?

**35 After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat.**

Paul was thankful to God even in the very face of death!

Of all these things that Paul has listed that has happened to him--Five times Whipped,

Three times beaten with rods, once stoned and left for dead, three times shipwrecked—All these equal 12 times that he has literally faced death. Each of these things may very well have killed him.

And this isn't even close to being all conclusive of the trials and tribulations that Paul yet had to face in this life... He would go on to face a lot more hardship and physical affliction before he goes to be with Jesus..

Yet even in the midst of adversity, of trial and tribulation, in the face of death itself, we see Paul stop and give thanks to God..

Was Paul thanking God for the whipping, for his beatings, for his stoning, for his shipwreck?

NO! He wasn't thanking God for the adversity in his life --He was thanking God because of who God is and what God can do through the adversity in our life.

When Paul admonishes us to...

**Be joyful always; pray continually;**

**and give thanks in all circumstances**, he isn't asking us to do something that he, himself wasn't willing to do.

You see Paul walked the talk as a believer.

But how was Paul able to do it?

The same way that we are able to do it…

Because of the relationship that we have with Jesus and through our faith in Him.

After Paul gives his testimony to all these hardships he has gone through, he talks of a personal affliction.

He describes it as a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan that was sent to torment him.

It says that three times he pleaded, he begged God to take it away from him

Gods’ answer to Paul...

**2Cor 12:9 (NIV) But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."**

God was reaffirming something to Paul that Paul already knew**.**

When Paul was in the Philippian Jail with Silas, their backs laid open and bleeding from being whipped--What were they doing? Moaning and groaning and complaining about how unfair life was?

No! It says that they were praying and singing praises, giving thanks to God! How could they do that?

Because Gods power is made perfect in our weakness!

It was this realization that allowed Paul to give thanks to God in any circumstance that he found himself in..... Whether lying bloody and beaten in a dungeon or under a pile of rocks left for dead, or treading water in the middle of the seas.

God reassures Paul....

**2Cor 12:9 (NIV) But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."**

Paul's response to this truth...

**Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.**

**10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**

You see, it is only when we stop standing in our own strength that we will be able to let go and let God...

And once we do, then we stand, not by our might or by our power, which is very limited, but we stand by the power of His Strength and Might which is limitless.

There is an Old Testament example of this same kind of faith and spirit of thankfulness in the lives of three Hebrew slaves....

At a time when Gods people were held captive by the Babylonians, King Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had an image made of himself and ordered that all the people of the land, whether Babylonian or slave, bow and worship this image.

Three young Hebrew slaves, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, refused to bow down to any God but the God of their fathers, the one true God.

The king gives them one last chance and if they do not bow down to his image then they will be thrown alive into a fiery furnace.....

Here we see an Old Testament example of Gods power being made perfect in our weakness...

**Dani 3:16 (NIV) Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter.**

**17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king.**

**18 But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."**

This infuriates the King and he commands that the furnace be heated up 7 times hotter than normal.

He has his strongest soldiers bind Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the fiery furnace.

The heat is so intense that as the soldiers throw Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into the flames the soldiers are killed by the heat!

Listen to what happens...

**Dani 3:22 (NIV) The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego,**

**23 and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.**

**24 Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?"**

**They replied, "Certainly, O king."**

**25 He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods."**

**26 Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!"**

**So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire,**

**27 and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them.**

**They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.**

**28 Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God.**

**29 Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way."**

The king comes to an all important truth here...

**no other god can save in this way."**

No other God can save in the way of the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego!

You see, God is able to save us from any trial or tribulation that we may encounter. Our God is the God of creation! He spoke and the world came into existence!

He parted the red sea. Sent fire from heaven to destroy the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorra.

He shook the prison and opened the cell doors as Paul and Silas praised His name. He heals the sick, gives the blind back their sight and Raises the dead!

Our God can do anything that pleases Him.

He can deliver us from all of our trials and tribulations. He is able.

But even if He doesn't that's OK because His Grace is still sufficient..

Even if we are allowed to pass through the fire, even if our very life is taken from us, we can rest in the assurance that our God is able.

He is even able to deliver us in death..

For us, to be absent with the body is to be present with the Lord.

This is the truth that enabled these three Hebrew slaves to be willing to be burned to death rather than bow down to a false God.

It is the truth that enabled Paul to face death time and again as he preached the Gospel in a world that was often very hostile to its message.

It is the truth that enabled Steven to stand, arms outstretched to heaven praising God, as the stones that were being thrown were taking his very life.

It is the truth that enables you and I today to stand under the trials and tribulations of this life and even be thankful to God in the midst of them.

Paul said, **be joyful always! Pray continually! Give thanks in all circumstances for this is Gods will for you in Christ Jesus!**

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had to pass through the flames, but praise God, because they did God was glorified and a king and a kingdom came to recognize the one true God.

Paul had to endure hardship in life, but praise God!

Through his hardship we can draw much encouragement as we bear witness to Gods sustaining grace in his life and know that God is there for us also..

We may have to endure trial and tribulation in this life, we will one day too have to face the ultimate trial of life, death itself, but praise God! We have a God who is able! A God who's grace is sufficient!

**Hebr 7:25 (NIV) Therefore he (Jesus)**

**is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.**

Our God is able to get us through the trials and tribulations of this life and assure us of an eternity with Him in the next life.

Because of that fact, that reality, we can be joyful always, pray continually and give thanks to God in all circumstances.

**Heb.6: 19 We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.**

**We have this hope** (the hope of

Jesus, the hope of Gods sustaining grace)

**as an anchor for our soul that is firm and secure**.

An anchor proves itself, not when the ship is sailing along smooth but when the storm comes up and the ship must be held secure.

Jesus is an anchor that will hold us safe and

secure even in the fiercest storms that this life has to offer....

Play song--Ray Boltz -The Anchor Holds

Are you thankful this morning? Are you thankful for Jesus? Are you thankful that in Him you have an Anchor. An anchor that will hold you safe and secure-- safe and secure through the trials and tribulations of this life and an anchor that will hold you firm in the faith until you reach your eternal destination with Him?

If you don't have Jesus as the anchor of your life, would you like Him to become your anchor this morning?

Prayer- Invitation

**"The Anchor Holds"**

I have journeyed  
Through the long dark night  
Out on the open sea  
By faith alone--Sight unknown  
And yet his eyes were watching me

(chorus)  
The anchor holds  
Though the ship is battered  
The anchor holds  
Though the sails are torn  
I have fallen on my knees  
As I faced the raging seas  
The anchor holds  
In spite of the storm  
  
I've had visions  
I've had dreams  
I've even held them in my hand  
But I never knew  
They would slip right through  
Like they were only grains of sand  
  
(Chorus)

I have been young  
But I am older now  
And there has been beauty these eyes have seen  
But it was in the night  
Through the storms of my life  
That's where God proved his love to me  
  
(chorus)