

Give Thanks To God (作個感恩人)
By T.C. Lo (11/27/2011 sermon at HoCL)

Theme Scripture: Luke 17:11-19

Sermon Outline:

- We are living in a generation of ingratitude (這是一個忘恩忘本的世代)
- Things Christians should be thankful for (基督徒感恩的內容):
 1. Be thankful for the material blessings God gives you (為我們所獲得的物質上的福氣感謝神)
 2. Thank God for the people in your life (為我們生命中所接觸的人感謝神)
 3. Thank God in the midst of trials and even persecution (在我們所遭遇到的試練甚至迫害中感謝神)
 4. Thank God especially for His salvation in Jesus Christ (為神所賜給我們在基督裡的救恩感謝神)
 5. Thank God for His continued presence and power in your life (為神在我們生命中不斷的同在和加力感謝神)
 6. We must thank God for His providence upon His church (為神在教會中奇妙的作為感謝神)
- Thanksgiving should be our lifestyle (把感恩作為我們的生活習慣與形態)

LK. 17:11 Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee.

LK. 17:12 As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance

LK. 17:13 and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

LK. 17:14 When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed.

LK. 17:15 One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice.

LK. 17:16 He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him--and he was a Samaritan.

LK. 17:17 Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?"

LK. 17:18 Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"

LK. 17:19 Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

One day outside a village 10 lepers approached Jesus, pleading for him to heal them. Miraculously they were restored to perfect health, but only one "threw

himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him" (Luke. 17:16). All the rest left without a single word of thanks, their minds preoccupied with themselves, gripped by a spirit of ingratitude.

(1) We are living in a generation of ingratitude

Ingratitude and thanklessness are far too common in our postmodern world.

- Children forgot to thank their parents for all that they do....
- Common courtesy is scorned....
- Bosses forgot that their employees have already worked 16 hours a day and still ask for more.
- Employees complain not being paid well but forgot that they still have jobs.
- People take for granted the way others help them.
- And above all, we fail to thank God for His blessings.

At the root of our ingratitude is our arrogance. We are too proud to pray. Self-aggrandizement and thanklessness are two sides of the same coin.

Heavyweight boxing champion of the world Muhammad Ali flew to one of his engagements. During the flight the aircraft ran into foul weather, and mild to moderate turbulence began to toss the airplane about. All nervous fliers were instructed to fasten their seatbelts immediately. Everyone complied but Ali. Noticing this, the flight attendant approached him and requested that he should observe the captain's order, only to hear Ali audaciously respond, "*Superman don't need no seatbelt.*" The witty flight attendant did not miss a beat and snapped back, "*Superman don't need no airplane either.*"

Our ability, our high education degree, our job security, our good health, our achievements may cause us to think that we are Supermen or Superwomen and that we have no need to depend on God.

Francis S. Collins (Chief scientist of the Human Genome Project during the Clinton administration) once gave a lecture "What Does It Mean To Be Human?" to a group of scholars many of them were atheists. Near the closing moment of his presentation, he showed a slide with two marvelous pictures on it. He first covered up the right side and exposed only the left side. What was seen was a magnificent picture of a rainbow colored stained glass rose window taken from the famous Cathedral of York Minster of England. People marveled at its beauty, its geometrical proportion, and its artistic color arrangement. Then he uncovered the right side on which was a very eye-catching image of the vertical cross section of a strand of human DNA. The audience was overwhelmed by the awe-inspiring beauty and the intricacy of the DNA that made them breathless. Collins, while letting his audience to engross in the images, said nothing, but picked up a guitar and started to play a hymn, praising the Grand Designer.

I wonder what kind of logic that causes the atheists to believe that the DNA was a result of the mindless evolution while insist that the brilliant colorful window was

the design of an artist. If one of the two has to come from evolution, the rose window should have been more likely than would the DNA. Do you know that three billion codes of the human genome (人類基因組) is equivalent of 75,490 pages of the New York Times? Prejudice distorts people's perception! It only concludes that people's debelief in God is not the lack of evidences but the suppression of them due to their philosophical pre-commitment.

Ah! You see: One of the Bible's indictments against rebellious humanity is that "although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him." (Rm. 1:21)

Atheists will not and cannot give praise and thanksgiving to God. But to those who are true believers of Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God is most distinctive marks of expressing their genuine faith.

(2) Things Christians should be thankful for

There are six reasons for which we can give thanks to God.

- **First, be thankful for the material blessings God gives you**

Some people are never satisfied with what they have. But what a difference it makes when we realize that everything we have has been given to us by God! King David prayed, "Wealth and honor come from you....Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name....Everything comes from you." (I Chr 29:12-14)

I knew a man who was the owners of many restaurants and motels in New York; he was successful and rich----the envy of all his friends and business associates as far as wealth was concerned. But he did not know the Lord. I believed no one including myself dared to tell him about Jesus because his mind was closed to spiritual matters. Later on, he had cancer and was lying on his death bed. His sickness gave me boldness to visited him several times and read to him Bible passages. He was a lonely man and had never been married. I believed I might well have been the only person on this earth to inquire his soul. As I told him about the Gospel, his lip quivered slightly and his eyes misted over with tears sensing that he felt loved by someone in time of suffering. I did not pray with him the "Decision for Christ" prayer, but wrote on a piece of paper a salvation prayer for him. I told him if you are persuaded by what I had told you, pray according to this written prayer from your heart. He died in 2006 and I went to his funeral. I am not absolutely certain whether he had been saved or not. Wealth had not been able to fill the empty place in his heart only Jesus could.

People believe in money rather than God. Is money really reliable? Do you still remember that only few years ago your 401K became 201K?

On “Black Tuesday,” October 29, 1929, the market dropped \$14 billions in a single day. Wealth worth four times the budget of the United States government evaporated in a few hours. *Ref. “The SNOWBALL Warren Buffett and the Business of Life” by Alice Schroeder; page 41.*

Are we constantly preoccupied with what we do not have? Or have we learned to thank God for what we do have now?

- **Second, thank God for the people in your life**

It is so easy to take other people for granted or to complain and become angry because they do not meet our every wish. But we need to give thanks for those around us---Our spouses, our children, our relatives, our brothers and sisters, and our friends. It is easy to thank God when you are surrounded by lovely people. But how should we thank our God when we encounter not-so-lovely people?

The city of Corinth, in Paul’s time, was a sinful city. There were a common colloquial saying “you are a Corinthian” to refer to an immoral person. So it was not surprised to learn that the Christians in Corinth were far from perfect, but Paul began his first Letter to the Corinthian church by saying, “I always thank my God for you.” (I Corinthians 1:4)

On Paul’s last missionary journey to the capital city of the Roman Empire, the Bible says that when a group of believers who Paul had never met came out to greet him as he approached Rome, “at the sight of these men Paul thanked God and was encouraged” (Act 28:15).

We can thank God for those who do not meet our expectation or those whom we even don’t know well.

- **Third, thank God in the midst of trials and even persecution**

We draw back from difficulties, and yet not one of us is exempt from trouble. In many parts of the world it is dangerous even to be a Christian because of persecution. Yet in the midst of trials we can thank God because we know he has promised to be with us, and he will help us.

God can use times of suffering to draw us closer to Him: “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.” (James 1:2-3)

When Daniel learned that evil men were plotting against him to destroy him, he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. (Dan 6:10)

I am increasingly convinced that suffering in the presence of God is far better than pleasure with the absence of God. If you are given a hard choice between wishing your family to live a comfortable life without God and enduring a poor life but with the presence of God, what would your choice be? Oh My! This is a hard choice. But I think I would rather see my family poor with God than see them rich without God.

I don't know what trials you may be facing right now, but God does. He loves you. So cultivate a spirit of thankfulness even in the midst of trials and heart-aches.

We know that our world is not a perfect world to live in. But to believers, our world is the best world that God put us in to prepare us for the perfect world in eternity because sufferings can bring about spiritual goodness. For this, we should be thankful.

Blind from her birth, Fanny Crosby, who used to live not far from here, had encouraged many people who were suffering in her days. Even today, her songs still influence many people of our times. She had written many hymns that inspired people to come near to Christ. Examples:

- Safe in the arms of Jesus
- Tell me the story of Jesus
- Blessed assurance
- All the way my Savior leads me
- Near the cross
- Draw me near

When a man born blind was healed by Jesus, the Pharisees questioned Jesus, "Who sinned, this man or his parents?" (John 9) In an amazing way, Jesus turned the question back to the Pharisees and pointed to them that those who had physical sight but no vision of the soul were actually the blind ones. Ironically, the physically blind person at least knew his physical disability; the spiritually blind person had no inkling of his greater spiritual disability.

More importantly, in the midst of our trial, we do not suffer alone, our Savior and High Priest walks with us. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin (He.4:15). God in His marvelous wisdom may not remove the unfavorable circumstances from us for our own good; He gives us strength to overcome them. In light of this, how can we not be thankful to Him?

- **Fourth, thank God especially for His salvation in Jesus Christ**

The Bible tells us that we are separated from God because we have sinned. But God loves us----He loves you----and He wants us to be part of His family forever. He loves us so much that He sent His only Son into the world to die as a perfect

sacrifice for our sins, and He rose again to offer us new life, eternal life. “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

But we must reach out in faith to accept Christ as our Lord and Savior. We should not let a day go by without thanking God for His mercy and grace to us in Jesus Christ. We must spread the gospel to unbelieving friends in response to His priceless love as a way to thank Him.

A popular illustration is very popular with those committed to evangelism. In this view fallen man is seen as a drowning man who is unable to swim. He has gone under twice and bobbed to the surface for the last time. If he goes under again he will die. His only hope is for God to throw him a life preserver. God throws the lifeline and tosses it precisely to the edge of the man’s outstretched fingers. All the man has to do to be saved is to grab hold. If he will only grab hold of the life preserver, God will tow him in and he will not perish. Do you think this dying man should thank God for His saving grace?

Let us not argue for now the age-old difficulty of Calvinism versus Arminianism (note). If you are a Calvinist, you would believe this drowning man is not just holding on his last breath, he is already drowned and sunk to the bottom of the sea. God has to make Him alive first so he might have the strength and the will to grab the life preserver. The Bible says, “But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved (Eph.2:4-5). Do you think this dead man should even thank God more for His saving grace?

Whether you are Calvinists or Arminians, you have reason to thank God for His priceless salvation accomplished on the cross.

“How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me? I can’t. But I can do what pleases God: I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD. I will fulfill my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people.” (Ps 116:12-14)

- **Fifthly, thank God for His continued presence and power in your life**

When we come to Christ, it is not the end but the beginning of a new life! He is with us and wants to help us to follow Him and obey His word.

The merit-based religions demand us to do good things. But they never know how much they owe their gods. They do and do and do but they never know they have done enough. They pay and pay and pay but they never know how much they owe, and they can’t even talk to their bank manager. Apart from believing in Christ, people have no certainty for their salvation!

You and I know that based on our existential experiences we realize that in ourselves we do not have the strength we need to live the way God wants us to live. But when we turn to Him, we discover that “it is God who works in us to will and to act according to His good purpose.” (Phil 2:13)

Jesus promised His disciples, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me...Surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt 28:18-20). What a comforting promise!

Jesus came not to make a bad man good, but to make a dead man alive. Once we were made alive, we then have the strength and will to do His will. For his enablement, Christians should be thankful.

- **Finally, we must thank God for His providence upon His church**

Sometimes Christians may be discouraged by what we see around us. The American society seems to be overwhelmed by atheism which has even become more and more militant. Christians seem to lose their influence. The gospel is being looked down upon and our youths face unfavorable peer pressure when they have gone to campuses. Satan appears to be at the upper hand. But fear not; history has borne witnesses that the kingdom of God will triumph.

Napoleon was right when he said, “Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne (查理曼大帝) and I myself have founded great empires; but upon what did these creations of our (military) genius depend? Upon forces! But Jesus alone founded His Empire upon love, and to this very day millions will die for Him.” Looking back on history, empires came and were gone---gone with the wind, but the Church of Jesus Christ *endures forever*.

If our God reigns over history, He certainly will reign over our lives. Therefore, whatever happens in our lives, we can be sure that He knows our situation and that He will protect us from evil because nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.

Our church, the House of Christ’s Love, was found in the midst of suffering. Brothers and sisters lost their joy of serving. During the process of their struggling, the Holy Spirit miraculously intercepted: Around August of 2010, in an unplanned, unanticipated circumstance, several families decided to have weekly prayer meetings. We pray only for our closeness to God through the Scripture, particularly through the Book of Psalms. A few weeks afterwards, all of us seemed to be edified and began to feel the restored joy in our hearts. One night in September (2010) during our group prayer meeting, all of us, without being influenced by one another, seemed to be moved by the Holy Spirit to one vision. We felt God wants us to begin a new ministry. In each step of our way during the preparation, we saw God’s affirmations in many aspects. To be sure, we were very careful in our decision, humbly looking for signs with which God would use

to stop our course had we ever misunderstood His will. We are confident now that what we have been gone through is an irresistible Heavenly Call. After nearly one year of serving God here, we all marvel at His guidance and should give thanks to Him. Let's be the lilies amongst the thorns. We can be reminded and encouraged by missionary William Borden's famous line: *No reserves. No retreats. No regrets.*

(3) Thanksgiving should be our lifestyle

Thanksgiving---the giving of thanks---to God for all His blessing is one of the most distinctive marks of the true believer in Jesus Christ. Is that true in your life and in my life? Hardly anything can turn us into bitter, selfish, dissatisfied people more quickly than an ungrateful heart. And nothing does more to restore contentment and the joy of our salvation than a true spirit of thankfulness.

Let us make thanksgiving not just a once-a-year event, but a habit and life style of thanks-living. Through our prayers, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph.5:20).