

Very Real Blessings

Slide -

Slide -In the song "Count Your Blessings" the refrain encourages us to "count our blessings one by one and see what God has done."

The idea is to focus on individual things, very real things in our lives that contribute to our happiness and give God the glory or give God the credit for these things.

Sometimes, especially when we're down or sad or stressed, it helps us to specify what our blessings are from God so that we can better appreciate them and appreciate the God who provides them.

That is a very valuable spiritual exercise during very difficult moments whether it is illness or boredom.

But during times that are difficult the natural thing to do is to review the difficulty and maybe wince or moan

But reviewing the blessing is a way to pick oneself up and to get things into perspective.

In the United States, we celebrate Thanksgiving Day each year.

This is a general holiday where people are encouraged to appreciate this nation and all that we have here.

If any nation can celebrate Thanksgiving, it is the United States.

In my lesson today, however, I'd like to get a little more specific about the very real blessings that we have and can be thankful for each and every day.

Physical Blessings

The first group of blessings are the most obvious ones, the ones we can see and touch and measure.

Actually, the number of these are beyond measure but there are a few that we take for granted and that should be mentioned:

Slide -1. We Have Food

Despite the doom and gloom of "Climate Change" our markets are bursting with every kind of fruit, grains, vegetable and meat possible.

We have too much food!

In a world where millions go to bed hungry our main worry in the United States is that we eat too much food, not too little food!

We have to discipline ourselves not to eat too much.

Think of the contrast between us and other places and other people who could only dream about having too much food

Slide -2. We Have Jobs

In a free market system like ours the unemployment rate is usually between 4-5%.

It's not possible to get it much lower than 4% because of the cycle of workers leaving one job for another.

In the United States our current rate of unemployment is 3.8%.

This means that 96.2% of the people who want a job or want to work, have a job.

Economically and statistically - it doesn't get much better than this.

Oh, you may not have the job you want or the one you feel you deserve;

maybe you could use more money - but we all have paying jobs and that's a very real blessing!

Slide -3. We Have Peace

The history of the world is the history of war interrupted by short periods of peace.

The United States, as a nation, has been at peace for almost 60 years.

Oh yes, there are terrorist attacks, foreign wars, threats of war but here in the United States no civil wars

No army is occupying our cities, no one is shelling our buildings - no bombs, no civil unrest.

We complain a lot, and comment on other nations' problems, but we are at peace.

If you don't think that 60 years of political freedom, and civil peace is a blessing –

Then ask people from other countries who have experienced war and oppression if this is not a true blessing.

Ask the relatives of some 500,000 people in Syria who have been killed, by their own president.

Dropping barrel bombs in housing developments.

Indiscriminately killing women, children, babies, the elderly.

A million refugees just trying to get out of the way of those bombs and bullets. That is their reality.

Slide -Like I said, we take these type of blessings for granted but we shouldn't because:

A change in weather could damage our harvest resulting in food shortages.

The best farming techniques can't control drought or floods - only God does this.

And there's no guarantee that the economy will always be good.

Economies are fragile things and the government can't protect you if there's a depression that throws many people out of work.

I know because we have experience economic depression in my life time

Of course, we shouldn't take peace for granted either.

Wars can begin over little things.

Leaders with big egos have been known to plunge their nations into foolish and bloody wars.

One person with one bomb could destroy our sense of peace and safety.

I say this because these blessings we have are very real, and we are actually experiencing them now, and we should be thankful for them because they can disappear.

I am sure we remember the day when a plane flew into one of the towers

We all remember where we were and asking ourselves is this for real, actually happening.

At first thinking it was an accident a plane hitting the tower but then to see the second plane

Then to realize this was done on purpose and then to watch those towers come down.

And that happened in just a few hours of one day and then started a new reality for Americans.

Spiritual Blessings

Of course, as Christians we not only give thanks for physical things but also the spiritual blessings we enjoy in Christ.

Again, there are numerous but a few and very tangible ones are:

Slide -1. Knowledge of the Truth

Slide -Jesus said in John 8:32 *"And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."*

1. **Slide** -We know the truth about: Where and how the world began
2. **Slide** -We know the truth about: Why we exist
3. **Slide** -We know the truth about: How it will end and what will happen
4. **Slide** -We know the truth about: What happens after death and how we prepare for death, we don't speculate
5. **Slide** -We know the truth about: How to live in this world
6. **Slide** -We know the truth about: Who and how God is, we know that.

We are free from ignorance, fear, shame and condemnation we have the truth against which all things can be measured.

That's a blessing

Slide -2. Friendship with God

Slide -Jesus said, in John 15:14 *"You are My friends if you do whatever I command you."*

Most of us strive to find and keep friends, they are among the most precious things we have.

Many try to cultivate friendships among the rich and powerful to gain advantage somehow.

We, however, are friends with God, the creator of wealth, the seat of all power.

In the Old Testament the Jews had to go through a priest and he in turn had to go through an elaborate ceremony in order to communicate with God.

Violation of the manner of communication resulted in death.

But as Christians, we are intimate friends with God.

We talk to Him when we want to, whenever we want to. At any time, at any place

We can ask for forgiveness at any time, we can ask for favors; we can praise and rejoice at all times and every day.

Why? All because we are friends with God.

We know what He wants, and we know what pleases Him.

Do you realize, God enjoys our company and because of Christ we enjoy His company?

And we enjoy it without fear, without condemnation, without ceremony, without dread because we look forward to being together forever in heaven.

An arrangement that God Himself has organized and guaranteed us through His Son Jesus Christ.

We should be very thankful for that.

Slide -3. Eternal Life

Slide -John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

We will not be extinguished.

Isn't that the most difficult thing when we lose someone, they are not there anymore.

We may had just talked with them last week or a couple of days ago and then they are gone.

We will never see them again in this life.

But God promises us eternal life

I will not be extinguished I will be me but a perfect me forever.

This is the great promise of Christianity. True Christianity

The ceremonies we do all point to this:

Slide -Baptism acts out a burial and a resurrection to a new life.

Communion reminds us of the way this was accomplished through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Regardless of the condition of our lives now, the great blessing of Christianity is that we know that we will always be us and someday will become the us we always wanted to be forever.

We all know we are not perfect right now, we are still striving for that perfection but someday we will be perfect in Christ.

The promise that God has made to us is that someday it will happen, finally.

Slide -Paul says in Ephesians 1:3 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ”

and these three,

knowledge of the truth, friendship with God and eternal life are the very real blessings into which all of the others can fit.

Floral City Blessings

Now this review of our blessings would not be complete if we didn't mention some of the very real blessings that we, as Christians here in this church enjoy from God.

Slide -1. We have Unity

There is one mind and one heart in this congregation - it exists, and it is evident.

Oh, there are the normal stresses and strains that occur from time to time (but that's normal in any family).

But we are united one belief, one hope, one love for God and each other.

Slide -Ephesians 4:3-5 “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism”

While in the society around us there is suspicion, intolerance, division among cultural groups or political groups.

Here, in the Lord's church, we have different cultures living in harmony.

We are enjoying a golden period of peace and unity - not every church has this –

we have to realize that this is a very great and very real blessing.

Slide -2. We have Opportunity

In many places the church has to deal with: War, civil unrest, tragedy, poverty, disease, persecution, etc.

Most of the church's efforts are invested in staying alive! And have been since the beginning.

We, on the other hand, have peace, prosperity, modern technology.

We have a full-time minister while in many other churches one minister is caring for two or more congregations.

Opportunity is staring us in the face!

Slide -Opportunity to reach out and share our faith (online; personal outreach, also known as evangelism!)

Opportunity to grow and build relationships with one another in Christ.

Not every congregation has these opportunities, not every church can devote all its efforts to growth –

we need to recognize what we have here, and not let these opportunities go by.

What To Do

You know, when you stop to think of it, all of these physical, spiritual, and individual blessings can overwhelm us –

we don't know what to do with them all!

In order to really appreciate all we have fully, here are a few things we need to do:

Slide -1. Give thanks for all things

You can't really be satisfied with your blessings unless you give thanks.

This is why many rich people or those with great talent or advantages but no faith, often feel unfulfilled, unsatisfied –

they are not grateful, they don't give thanks (they think there's no need).

Paul says that this is the sin that leads to all others:

Slide -Romans 1:21 “because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts,

The first sin, neglect to say thank you and that can lead to all the others.

Giving thanks, having a grateful heart before God is what enables us to actually enjoy our blessings with a clear conscience and a peaceful heart.

The nation "feels" thankful once a year on the holiday –

as Christians we should give thanks and be grateful for everything, every day –

and in doing so enjoy the spiritual blessings that come from having a thankful heart.

Another thing to do in order to fully appreciate our many blessings...

Slide -2. Take the time to enjoy all your blessings

People are in such a hurry - they miss so many wonderful things in life.

It's not a sin to take the time to savor, to enjoy, to taste the good things of God.

It's ok to celebrate with food and laughter and fellowship.

Did Jesus not attend a wedding as well as a funeral?

Do we think we're better Christians because we seldom laugh?

Or we don't rejoice? Or celebrate?

Slide -Paul says that self-denial for its own sake may look like true religion,

but it has no power to make you better or more pleasing to God - Colossians 2:16-23.

“So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, 17 which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. 18 Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, 19 and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God. 20 Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations— 21 “Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,” 22 which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men? 23 These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.”

Why do you think God gave the Jews many festivals throughout the year where they were to celebrate, feast, rejoice and be thankful?

And just for a day but for a week.

Life is hard enough all by itself.

God wants us to be thankful and actually enjoy the things He has given us to enjoy.

If as a parent, you would enjoy watching your son or daughter enjoy something you have given them

Image the satisfaction that God takes as our Father observing how we enjoy and savor the good things that He has given us, same thing.

Finally, in the face of so many blessings...

Slide -3. Take advantage of your blessings

A. Physical Blessings - as far as your physical blessings - build on them; grow; invest in yourself, your family, your church, your business, your community.

Solomon says that you need to:

Slide -Ecclesiastes 11:1 “Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days.”

In other words, launch out, step out in faith, step up and take responsibility - God will provide.

Take advantage of these times of blessings, is necessary they don't go on indefinitely.

You don't always have your health, you don't always have opportunity

God gives us blessing and I believe the He enjoys the fact that we exploit them and use them.

That we share them and rejoice in them

B. Spiritual Blessings - finally, as far as our spiritual blessings are concerned,

let's remember to actually take advantage of the things God has given us in Jesus.

The way to do that is to take a step forward in our own growth process.

Slide -Take a step - the next step that you need to take to grow in Christ.

You know what that is:

Give up a bad habit, today.

Be baptized, if you haven't, take the opportunity. Is there someone here who after all the teaching that has been done and even what Jesus Himself has said about salvation.

Be restored, without delay.

Be reconciled, to your old friend, relative or enemy.

Start a new ministry.

Whatever the next step is, you know what it is and God knows it too

take advantage of the blessings here and take the next step.

If you want to show your gratitude for all your many blessings by taking a step forward - do it today.

If you need prayers as we stand and sing.