

SOWING GRATITUDE, HARVESTING BLESSINGS:

Saying Grace

Deuteronomy 8:11-20

November 8, 2015

AUDIO: <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/owing-gratitude-harvesting-blessings-saying-grace/>

During this sermon series, I want us to capture the cycle of sowing and harvesting. We sow gratitude, which shows itself in giving (our money, time, talents), which then produces blessings--the blessing of one soul won to Christ, or one hungry mouth fed, or one lonely person comforted. But there is no blessing without giving and no giving without first there being gratitude.

So that got me thinking. Isn't it true that the more prosperity we experience, the more grateful we become? Sometimes, but many times, it's the opposite--the more prosperity, the less grateful we become. Here's another one. We would normally think that the more blessings, the closer we would draw to God. Right? Wrong. Often, prosperity lures us away from God.

Why is that? Well, for one thing, prosperity leads to forgetting God. Read vv. 12-13. C.S. Lewis wrote in *The Screwtape Letters*, "Prosperity knits a man to the World. He feels that he is 'finding his place in it,' while really it is finding its place in him" [p. 155]. And once we forget God, we fall into self-sufficiency. We begin to believe the lie that we've done this ourselves (read carefully vv. 17-18a). Perhaps we'll all take credit for the sunshine, the rain, the air we breathe and while we're at it, for the earth spinning on its axis and staying just the right distance from the sun! We are like the fly in Aesop's Fables, who was riding on the chariot. He looked back and declared, "My, what a dust storm I'm causing!" Author Don Miller has written that we're all like spoiled children, no longer impressed with the gifts we've been given--another sunset? Yawn. Another day on earth? Boring. Another paycheck? Why isn't it more? [*A Million Miles in a Thousand Years*, p. 58].

To those of you who are not yet followers of Christ, I understand. Right now, you don't feel the need for a Savior because you feel self-sufficient. All is well. But what happens when those blessings dry up? What happens when that thin veneer of success is rubbed off? When you are naked and broken before God? You will be needy. And you will be perhaps ready to repent of that self-sufficiency and trust Christ. Because it's all grace.

Have you ever thought about what we call our mealtime prayer? Saying grace. Odd phrasing. Why? It's because we recognize it's all grace, not our works. In saying grace, we are literally, saying, "Grace." Grace did this. Grace gave me this. I didn't make it myself. God gave me the strength to do it. If we don't believe that, then we should bow our heads and say works. Kids, bow your heads, Dad's going to say works (or earned it, or deserved it).

I find it interesting to trace the history of revivals and spiritual awakenings. Church historians point out that when genuine awakening is occurring, people not only repent of major sin

behaviors; they also repent of inner attitudes. Attitudes of entitlement, of presumption and of ingratitude. Remember the sermon series flow? Gratitude is sown. Blessings are harvested.

The Book of Deuteronomy is a fascinating book. It is so important, it is quoted or mentioned in all but six of the New Testament books. Deuteronomy's theme? Loving God with all our hearts. In other words, getting our attitudes and our actions washed in the blood of Jesus!

When the great social reformer William Wilberforce was converted to Christ, those closest to him noticed that two changes manifested themselves: his new attitude toward money and toward time [*Amazing Grace: William Wilberforce and the Heroic Campaign to End Slavery* by Eric Metaxas, p. 63]. He sowed gratitude with his money, time and influence and the harvest was a truckload of blessings from which we still benefit.

I read once that the quality of our giving is not tied to our economic status; it is tied to our relationship with Jesus Christ [I attribute this to Cecil Ray, though I cannot find the exact source]. We didn't do this ourselves. And that leads to gratitude, which leads to giving, which leads to blessings.