

SERMON

Text:¹ Rom. 1:8

C.I.T.: (S.S.T. Etc.)² Paul expressed thanksgiving for the Roman Christians.

Thesis:³ Expressions of thanksgiving are important for Christians today.

Major Objective:⁴ Devotional

Specific Objective:⁵ That my congregation would renew its efforts at expressing thanksgiving.

Title:⁶ An Eucharist Moment

Body:⁷

Places preached:

GWU div school chapel, April 29, 2002

¹The chapter and verse reference to the passage which is the scriptural basis of the sermon (*Steps*, 34-37, 54-65).

²Central Idea of Text, a short, clear statement (simple sentence) with past tense verb of what the basic meaning of the text was to those who first heard the passage (*Steps*, 42-46).

³The statement of the C.I.T. with present tense verb, as to the contemporary meaning of the passage. Thesis always grows out of C.I.T., but especially with highly historically conditioned texts, it may not be the same as the C.I.T. (*Steps*, 42-46).

⁴The designation of a general direction for the sermon in one of the following areas: **Evangelistic** (to reach the lost); **Devotional** (to lead Christians to love, adore and worship God); **Doctrinal** (to inform the congregation concerning a specific doctrinal truth); **Ethical** (to challenge the congregation to develop some area of Christian relationship); **Consecrative** (to lead the congregation to commitment for some area of service to God); **Supportive** (to give encouragement to those in times of suffering) (*Steps*, 15-18).

⁵A simple sentence relating directly to “one aspect of one major objective in one sermon to one audience on one occasion.” The statement should be formulated following these guidelines: should reach for the most pressing need in the congregations discoverable, should be a single thrust, should be the controlling factor for the entire sermon, should be biblical, that is, grow out of the C.I.T. and Thesis (*Steps*, 18).

⁶A well phrased, precisely stated summation of the sermon idea. It may be structured as an emphatic word phrase, limiting word phrase, interrogative sentence, imperative sentence or declarative sentence. The title should follow the following guidelines: clarity, accuracy (to text, CIT etc.), narrowness of scope, brevity (2 to 7 words), (*Steps*, 95-105).

⁷See *Steps*, 105-129, for important discussion. The headings must be in simple complete sentence, not in phrases or key words. Under each heading supply some detail as to the intended development of that point through the use of explanation, illustration and application. For the purposes of this assignment, give greatest detail to the explanation section. This should be in line, although in simplified form, with the exegesis section of this portion of the text in the paper.

INTRODUCTION

*Πρῶτον μὲν εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ μου διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ περὶ πάντων ὑμῶν.*⁸ With these words Paul opens the proem of his letter to the believing communities in the imperial capital of the ancient world. These words, composed at the end of the third missionary journey in the middle 50s, resonate a familiar refrain of virtually every proem in the Pauline corpus.⁹ Paul found expressing thanksgiving both natural and necessary. His eucharist moments were frequent and profound.

In so doing, the great apostle merely followed a great tradition of his Jewish heritage. The ancient Israelite people often expressed thanksgiving to God for a variety of blessings both to individuals as well as to the covenant community.¹⁰

With such a rich heritage in our religious roots both in the Old Testament and the New Testament, we modern day believers have both a model and a mandate for expressing thanksgiving.

⁸*Πρῶτον μὲν εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ μου διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ περὶ πάντων ὑμῶν* ὅτι ἡ πίστις ὑμῶν καταγγέλλεται ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ κόσμῳ.

⁹**1 Thess 1:2** - We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers,

2 Thess 1:3 -

1 Cor. 1:4 - I give thanks to God always for you because of the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus,

Rom. 1:8

Col. 1:3 - In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ

Phil 4

Eph. 1:15-16 - 1:15 I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason 1:16 I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers.

1 Tim 1:12a - I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me,

2 Tim 1:3 - I am grateful to God — whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did — when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day.

¹⁰יָדָה (yadaw) is mostly used of thanksgiving in the hiphil and hithpael; 111 of the 115 occurrences (<http://bible.crosswalk.com/Lexicons/Hebrew/heb.cgi?number=03034&version=nas>); תוֹדָה (towdah) is used 29 times out of 31 uses with the idea of thanksgiving, as well as confession (<http://bible.crosswalk.com/Lexicons/Hebrew/heb.cgi?number=08426&version=nas>). The thanksgiving psalms are a major collection in Israel's hymbook (<http://cranfordville.com/Psalmslst.html>).

For the time we have together today, I want to explore this with you. Numerous questions can arise: (1) How do we genuinely express thanksgiving? (2) To whom? God? Others? (3) How often should we express thanksgiving? (4) What should prompt the expression? (5) How should we go about expressing thanksgiving? Individually? Corporately? (6) Is thanksgiving something just verbal, or does it grow out of an inner attitude?

Our text in Romans provides an excellent launch pad into this subject. It stands as the core expression of the proem of Paul's letter to the various house church groups in the city of Rome. In the ancient letter writing world, the expression of thanksgiving to deity was an essential element. Paul took this tradition and enlarged it with creative expansions. With his letters written in mind for public reading as a part of worship, the proem, along with the usual benedictio at the end, underscored the involvement of God in the writing of the letter, similar to the invoking of God's presence and blessing on the worshippers.¹¹

I suspect that all of us, standing at the end of the semester with the pressure of term papers and final exams, could use a reminder on thanksgiving. Two emphases from the Rom. 1:8 text I want to underscore today: how thanksgiving can be expressed and how it becomes genuine.

BODY

I. Thanksgiving takes on various forms

The literary setting of our text, together with the insight from form criticism about the role that the letter proem played, underscores two perspectives about expressing thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving is both an individual expression, and a corporate worship expression. Paul personally thanked God for the witness of the Roman Christians. As the letter was read in worship, it became a corporate expression of thanksgiving to God for faithful witness.

Both of these aspects are important. As individual Christians, all of us need to express words of gratitude and thankfulness to God for His blessings. And often! The words *εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ μου* are always appropriate and needed¹². The spirit of thanksgiving pushes us beyond a self-centered tendency. It stands as a hedge against a 'woe is me' negativism.

Hard times become the test of our thanksgiving. When everything is flowing well, thanksgiving comes easily -- even perhaps superficially. Whether we possess a true spirit of thanksgiving

¹¹Cf. <http://cranfordville.com/Cranfordville/Proem-NT772.PDF> and <http://cranfordville.com/Cranfordville/Letters94.pdf>.

¹²*Eucharistia* occurs some 15 times in the NT; all but 3 are found in Paul (<http://bible.crosswalk.com/Lexicons/Greek/grk.cgi?number=2169&version=nas>). The verb *eucharistew* (<http://bible.crosswalk.com/Lexicons/Greek/grk.cgi?number=2168&version=nas>) occurs 37 times in the NT with 23 of them in Paul. The adjective *eucharistoß*, -on is found only in Colossians (<http://bible.crosswalk.com/Lexicons/Greek/grk.cgi?number=2170&version=nas>).

comes out when life begins to crumple in around and on top of us. With the positive witness of the Romans as the foundation of thanksgiving Paul could easily thank God for them: “ὅτι ἡ πίστις ὑμῶν καταγγέλλεται ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ κόσμῳ.” On the other hand, with the enormous problems in the Corinthian congregation Paul still was able to say: “Εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ μου πάντοτε περὶ ὑμῶν.”¹³ Then, with his personal situation of imprisonment and facing a very uncertain future, he said to the Philippians: “Εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ μου ἐπὶ πάσῃ τῇ μνεΐα ὑμῶν.”¹⁴

We can learn something here. Every moment in life is a potential eucharist moment! Good times and bad both qualify. Did you read the story of the “Lost Boys of Sudan” in the April 12 edition of the Biblical Recorder?¹⁵ Some 4,000 survivors of the 35,000 to 45,000 young boys who suffered unbelievable hardship in the war torn country of Sudan managed to come to US. In the worship service they led at St. John’s Baptist Church, the theme of thanksgiving was profound and moved members of the congregation as few worship services can. They bear no hatred toward the people who killed thousands of their friends and parents, as well as uprooted their lives. Just gratitude toward God for his unspeakable blessings! Truly an eucharist moment!

The text and the story about these young boys underscore the importance of the corporate expression of thanksgiving in worship. I would have loved to have been in that service. A few moments of public worship over the years have been profoundly moving experiences of thanksgiving like this one. I need more of them. Yes, I say ‘Thank you, God’ daily in my personal life, but I need to be with God’s people when we say ‘Thank you, Lord’ together. And do so with such profundity that our lives are moved deeply.

What do we say ‘Thank you’ for? We can -- and in our culture, I suspect, mostly do - thank God for blessings He has given to us personally. In Ephesians, Paul praised “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.”¹⁶ To Timothy he declared, “I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he judged me faithful and appointed me to his service, 13 even though

¹³1 Cor. 1:4

¹⁴Phil. 1:3

¹⁵Cf.

http://biblicalrecorder.mondosearch.com/cgi-bin/MsmGo.exe?grab_id=22113644&EXTRA_ARG=IMAGE%2EX%3D33%00%26IMAGE%2EY%3D12&host_id=1&page_id=441&query=Lost+boys&hiword=LOST+BOYS+

¹⁶Eph. 1:3. Εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ εὐλογήσας ἡμᾶς ἐν πάσῃ εὐλογία πνευματικῇ ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις ἐν Χριστῷ,

I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence.”¹⁷ Expressions of thanksgiving for specific divine blessings that have come into our personal lives are entirely appropriate. “Lord, grant us more sensitivity to recognize all that you do for us every day!”

But another focus of thanksgiving is equally important, if not more so. In our Romans text as well as the majority of the proema, Paul expressed thanksgiving for what God was doing in the lives of other people, even when one had to look long and hard to find something worthwhile. Now here is a real challenge! A religion that extends beyond the tip of our nose! It reaches out to others with sincere gratitude for what God is doing in their lives. Perhaps we’re moving toward authentic thanksgiving when we say “Thank you, Lord, for your blessings on ole Joe.” This pushes us toward real selflessness and genuine caring for others.

How ‘bout it? When old Joe gets the scholarship you wanted, can you say “Thank you, Lord”? When that plumb church staff position goes to someone else, can you say, “*Εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ μου*?” These, too, are eucharist moments!

II. Thanksgiving grows out of gratitude

A lot of what I’ve been pointing toward is defining authentic thanksgiving. Expressions of gratitude that are real and genuine, rather than phony platitudes we’re expected to say in individual or public prayers.

Where does authentic thanksgiving begin? Deep down inside us -- that’s where! When one carefully examines the causal expressions that extend the core thanksgiving in the proema of the Pauline corpus, the discovery will be made that Paul had a profound sense of gratitude that reached deep down inside his being. To Timothy he declared, “But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.”¹⁸ In the other proema Paul sees God at work in the lives of other people and feels a deep sense of gratitude for what God is doing. As Billy Graham once described it, “As a gospel preacher, I’m just a spectator standing aside and admiring God at work.”

The noun *eucharistia* underscores the disposition or attitude aspect in a few of its 15 uses in the New Testament. Most notably is Acts 24:3, where the Jewish lawyer Tertullus, at the outset of his speech to Felix, speaks of the Jewish ‘gratitude’ to the Roman authorities for their peace and provision for Jews. What phoniness! His words were politically correct platitudes with no

¹⁷1 Tim. 1:12-13. <1:12> Χάριν ἔχω τῷ ἐνδυναμώσαντί με Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν, ὅτι πιστόν με ἠγήσατο θέμενος εἰς διακονίαν <1:13> τὸ πρότερον ὄντα βλάσφημον καὶ διώκτην καὶ ὑβριστήν, ἀλλὰ ἠλεήθην, ὅτι ἀγνοῶν ἐποίησα ἐν ἀπιστίᾳ·

¹⁸1 Tim. 1:13-14. τὸ πρότερον ὄντα βλάσφημον καὶ διώκτην καὶ ὑβριστήν, ἀλλὰ ἠλεήθην, ὅτι ἀγνοῶν ἐποίησα ἐν ἀπιστίᾳ· <1:14> ὑπερεπλεόνασεν δὲ ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν μετὰ πίστεως καὶ ἀγάπης τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.

genuineness what so ever! Here lies a warning for us. We can mimic appropriate words of thanksgiving, but if they don't reflect genuine gratitude then the words are a lie. Our prayer becomes a lie! Lying to God -- not a wise move!

Authentic thanksgiving begins with a sense of the overwhelming presence and grace of God. With a temple experience of the divine like Isaiah had (Is. 6:1-13), we realize the depths of our need of God and the greatness of his blessings. Out of such an overflowing heart comes expressions of thanksgiving for others and for blessings. If our experience of God is shallow, our thanksgiving will be superficial. If God overwhelms us, then profound gratitude flows into ceaseless words of thanksgiving and praise to our Lord.

CONCLUSION

Now for the hard part. When was the last time you were in the temple with Isaiah? Or on the Damascus road with Saul of Tarsus? Or on the seashore with Peter holding a net full of fish?

Let me toss out a challenge. In the coming days when you sit down for a final exam, make that an eucharist moment. Professors, when you sit down to grade all those term papers. We need those eucharist moments badly. For our own spiritual health. And for the church's.

May God grant us the ability to say with Paul, “*εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ μου.*”