

## **“A Full Plate” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Thanksgiving Eve – November 23, 2022**

- I. **Philippians 4:19-20** - <sup>19</sup> And my God will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. <sup>20</sup> To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.
- II. **Are you ready?**
  - a. The day before Thanksgiving is almost like the starting gun of a big race...
    - i. We have butterflies, the competition is fierce – whether it's the neighbor with the better Christmas decorations... or the guy who beats us to the new TV on Black Friday...
  - b. But on a serious note, the next six weeks or so can lead to a full plate.
    - i. For many of us, we have quite a bit going on...
      1. You know that potluck or Thanksgiving dinner where your plate isn't quite big enough, so you pile it high... then start wedging more stuff wherever it fits?
      2. Our schedule and our lives get very full, and we don't always have room... especially if we are dealing with other trials and struggles.
  - c. Yet, Thanksgiving is the time when we give thanks – even when things seem overwhelming, or negative, or sad.
- III. **Paul's thankful heart has always encouraged me.**
  - a. I'm in awe of a guy writing from prison, and who faced untold hardships, and he is so thankful to God.
    - i. He shows us an “attitude of gratitude” that seems to go way beyond any normal person – even me and most Christians I know.
    - ii. Why is this thankfulness, and this encouragement from Paul to be thankful in all circumstances, such a difficult thing for so many of us to do?
  - b. Paul is writing to the Philippian Church from prison in Rome, and he faces hardships, questions about the future, illness, and even death.
    - i. The church members in Philippi also face these same problems in life
      1. Christians openly living out their faith in a Roman colony like Philippi did not face an easy existence... the gods of the Romans – and especially Caesar, were to be worshiped.
      2. In addition, false teachers and troublemakers were always making their way into the Church, and it caused damage to relationships and the work of Christ.
      3. Let's just say being a Christian didn't seem like it should produce an abundance of thanksgiving...
    - ii. Yet Paul, and those he encouraged by his Holy Spirit inspired writings, were thankful – and had a deep gratitude for a God who blessed them even when the going was tough.

- c. For people outside the faith, they may see giving thanks while at the same time struggling with all kinds of trials as a paradox... how can both take place at the same time?
  - i. Paul says he knows the “secret” to being content in the midst of trial – to be thankful in the middle of hardship...(vs 12)
  - ii. First, he trusts God with all his heart (just like it says to do in the first commandment), and he believes that “all things work together for good, for those who are called according to [God’s] purpose.” (Romans 8:28)
  - iii. Secondly, Paul also knows we are sinful (Romans 3:23), so we must struggle against the desire to ignore or despise our blessings and make it a point to give thanks in all circumstances.
- d. Giving thanks in spite of circumstances is a very difficult request... or is it a request at all?
  - i. Perhaps when we stop to think about it, giving thanks is a response that comes naturally – kind of like love tends to come out in response to being loved.
  - ii. And yet, it takes what? Thinking about it!

IV. **Have you tried writing a gratitude list?**

- a. Recently, I read about a classmate from high school who had a stroke and is working through a loss of vision among other problems.
  - i. Each day for last several weeks, she has written a post about what she is thankful for in her life.
  - ii. Family, husband, home, friends, and much more are parts of God’s provision that she can thank Him for.
- b. It’s not uncommon for people in 12-step programs to spend lots of time focusing on things to be thankful for – because life has become such a disaster for many of them it’s hard to have any gratitude.
- c. I mentioned a few years ago that some university studied people who made a gratitude list versus another group who did not.
  - i. They found that the people who regularly wrote down and pondered what they were thankful for had a much better outlook on life... more hope, more service to others, and more faith in in God.
- d. And God is the reason for all we have...
- e. When we think of being grateful, giving thanks, or acknowledging our gifts... our attention is aimed at God.

V. **God is behind all the blessings** we don’t deserve, but receive anyway.

- a. Yes, I often say it as a reminder, but our sin deserves punishment and rejection by God, but He chooses to seek us out and buy us back from our condition of hopelessness.
- b. That is our first point of thanksgiving – to thank God for redeeming us in His Son Jesus.

- i. He came as a peace offering... to reconcile us to the Father while we were enemies (Romans 5:10)
  - ii. And by grace, God forgives our sins and restores us completely...
  - iii. This is our greatest blessing of all, and we cannot thank God enough
- c. In addition to this saving grace, God is also giving us all that we need in our body and life.
  - i. After this message we read the first part of the Apostles' Creed and Luther's explanation of it – which is all about God's good gifts to support us in the world.
  - ii. The list is long, and if we have a gratitude list, we could spend a lifetime filling out the ways that God gets us by.
  - iii. You could say that He fills our plate with blessings until there's no more room, but He finds a way to keep adding to it!
- d. Finally, we can give thanks for the Holy Spirit as our Helper.
  - i. The Holy Spirit works in God's Word to bring us to faith, to strengthen us each day for our spiritual and earthly walk.
  - ii. The Holy Spirit makes us His temple, dwelling in us with God's very presence.
  - iii. Without the Holy Spirit, we could never give thanks in all circumstances, because we need the power of God to do such a thing.
- e. Yes, we all might have a full plate this holiday season, and it might seem like it's too much to handle – especially with hardships and trials...
  - i. But pause tonight, tomorrow, and even the following days and count your blessings.
  - ii. An attitude of gratitude toward God will change how you see that full plate... as it becomes a full plate of blessings...
  - iii. Give thanks in all circumstances... and trust in the one who gives us all we could ever need, and much more. Amen.

O give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; His steadfast love endures forever, Amen.  
(1 Chronicles 16:34 ESV)