

Nov. 23, 80 A.M. So. Prof -
(RA) (Thanksgiving)

THE THANKFUL SPIRIT

John 1:12
Romans 8:14

On a stormy night in 1860, a steamboat, The Lady Elgin - was wrecked by a lumber schooner in the lake - Lake Michigan. They were a mile off shore - of the 393 aboard - 279 drown. There was a hero, Edward Spencer, a student at Northwestern. He was a strong swimmer - he plunged in the lake and found people a float. And towed them to safety one after another. After making 17 round trips, he became delirious - and asked again and again - "did I do my best."

During the latter years of his life, on one of his Birthdays, some one asked him about that experience. A Chicago paper reported that the fact that not one of the seventeen returned to thank him.

Man's failure to express his thanks, I believe, was one of the burdens of our Lord. When he healed those ten lepers that day, only one came back. There was disappointment. Thankfulness is rare. It is rarer than we think. I have heard people say, I can almost forget anything - except ingratitude. If all that happens to us comes by chance, then of course, no man can be thankful or grateful. But thanksgiving would be not a duty then. Because no one would have anything in which to be thankful. But we do know that the thankful people are the happy people.

Dr. Norman Vincent Peale told a story about a man who came to him - he was very nervous. He would get up and walk across the room and finally he began to talk. I am a Christian layman, a business executive in this city, I live in the suburbs, and I commute back and forth each day. It takes 45 minutes for me to go and come. I have made it a rule for a good many years as I come each morning - to think about my day's work. I look at the problems, that I may face. I try to find some solutions for them.

Then in the afternoon, as I go back home, I spend the 45 minutes going over what happened. I try to see what mistakes I've made. And I have gotten to worrying a great deal about my business. And these are worrying times.

I have become so nervous - that I couldn't sleep so I went to a Doctor. He spent about an hour with me, and finally he said - you are about the best target I've ever seen for three things. A stomach ulcer, high blood pressure, and a heart attack. You are wide open for any of them or all of them.

I asked him what I should do about it. He answered - I cannot pour medicine into your mind. I would suggest that you talk to your minister.

So Dr. Peale, ¹ I have come to talk to you - can you give me a prescription. Dr. Peale said he talked a long time and then said, yes, I can give you something that will help if you will carry it out. I know it will be of great help - it probably will make you well. "

The man leaned over the desk and said, Dr. Peale, what is it. And he replied - I want you to start with this. I want you to commit to memory three verses of Scripture. And I want you to say them over every morning when you get on that train and during that 45 minute ride - think about them, or channel them into your thoughts. Say them over and when you get on that train this afternoon, meditate upon them as you go home. Get your Bible and read them. And read the surrounding verses - and (don't) think about your business at all while you are on that train.

These are the three verses that he suggested:

John 1:12 - As many as received him, to them gave he power to become
the sons of God.

Romans 8:14 - For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are
the sons of God.

Hosea 1:10 - In the place where it says unto them -- ye are not my
people, there it shall be said unto them, ye are the sons
of God. The sons of the living God.

Now I don't know what else he might have said to this man. But he said to
Dr. Peale - what the outcome was. For suddenly I saw a definite progression and
marvelous promise in these passages. I have never noticed how beautifully these
verses compliment each other. And they present a great theme.

You will find out - if you commit these three verses to memory, and say them
over often enough, there will come into your mind a grand assurance of security.
A security that is yours because you belong to God. And God belongs to you because
you are God's son and God is your Father. And you will come to realize that whatever
happens to you, you have a friend. You can trust. And this friend will never fail
you because he cares for his own. You will find his love in the 91st Psalm. "He
that dwelleth in the secret place of the most high, shall abide under the shadow of
the Almighty. Don't be afraid of the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flyeth
by day. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand.

But it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eye shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. You will experience this - and you will see it with your eyes. I think that is probably what he meant to say to this man.

So today, if those three verses were good for a man who was getting close to a nervous break-down, with high blood pressure, heart attack, and ulcer. Then it is good for every Christian to meditate on and commit to memory. I think we would keep them in the order in which they were given to this man - because they build up in progression. In a great way.

I. JOHN 1:12

(As many as received Him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God.) The big word in that sentence is "received". All of God's part is the plan of salvation. It has been complete - it is finished. Just as Jesus said on the cross. It is finished. The plan of salvation is finished. Our part is to receive it. As someone has said - the saddest words in all the Bible - are in the first chapter of John. He came unto his own and his own received Him not.

And it could be said of so many people in the world today - that Jesus came to them in this lovely land of ours - and they received Him not.

Why is it that the world has not received Jesus? I believe there are several reasons.

One, is inside of every one of us, there is a distaste and a dread of being inconsistent. We don't like the hypocrisy, we don't like to be one thing before all of our friends, and another thing somewhere else. We don't like secret sins in ourselves or in others.

When Jesus comes and knocks on the doors of our hearts, as Holloman Hunt's beautiful painting suggests, and he turns his head to listen and see if there are footsteps on the inside -- we don't open the door. We don't want Him because there is something inside our houses that we don't want him to see. There is something inside of us that will be out of place, with his lovely pure character. And we don't receive him. We don't become the sons of God.

Do you know there are (some places) in this city where a real Christian is not welcome. I'm not talking about over-pious people now. I am talking about snobbish people. Down to earth Christians. There are some places in your community where they are not welcome. There are circles where they are not wanted. That is a bad thing. They are not wanted because the people are doing things that Jesus Christ would not do or not like. So he says, that to them that will receive him - he will give the power to become the sons of God.

Zach. 3:1 - You will find a sentence that says, that Satan stood at his right hand to resist him. Every time you start toward that door to receive Christ, into your house, in which you live - Satan leans against it. And He is not going to let you open that door to receive Jesus Christ, if he can help it. And now thousands of ways he can help it.

This week I found a story about an editor's note, it was printed over 2 million copies in the past 20 years. I have never read it or seen it before. It read something like this -- The Devil decided to have an auction. He decided to go out of business and sell all of his tools. The auction day came, and a crowd of people gathered. And he placed all of his tools out on a red plush mat. The tools were envy, jealousy, greed, avarice, vengeance, resentment, hatred - all of them.

Oft to one side, he had a silver wedge. Someone asked him - what it was, and he said, that is a silver wedge. See how bright and shiney it is. It is the best tool I have. I put it over there because it is the most valuable. It is worth more than all of the other tools put together.

They asked, well - how do you use it. Satan answered, that is the wedge of (discouragement). You can take the finest Christian, one who has received Jesus into his life, and who is trying to serve him - and drive the wedge of discouragement into his Christian work. And you can wreck his usefulness. You can use this wedge on a Sunday School Teacher. And you can show him that he doesn't get the results that he wants. And you make him discouraged. You can use this on a Sunday School Superintendent or Director. Or on a Woman's Missionary Union President. Who is dead in earnest about their work - but they become often discouraged. And I can drive that wedge in - and I can pry open a door and all of the rest of my helpers can go in. And I can break that life down with discouragement.

After a moment someone asked, Satan, are there (any people) in the world that you cannot use that wedge on.

He answered, just (one group) of people -- and everybody pressed forward and said

who are they. They are the (thankful people) - the people that have gratitude in their hearts. They are the humble people. They are the people that thank their Heavenly Father for all of the blessings in their lives. They are the people who have thrown open the doors of their hearts and let Jesus come in. People who know that God is their father, and that they are his children. Are not easy targets for Satan's silver wedge of discouragement.

This might be illustrated by a (story) of a refugee. The British Council in (Crewkerne) England was helping a family - a foreign born man. And they brought him to their town, and raised \$4,000 to furnish a nice house for him. To stock the house with food, clothing, and to get him a good paying job. He was welcomed like a (hero).

But in a matter of weeks, he left Crewkerne for London. (London) is the place where the money is - and he became insulted because the folks would not allow him to take the (furniture) with him as he moved to London. In fact, the people were shocked. And they said, we feel as though this man has spit in our eye.

So there are degrees of gratitude and qualities of character that go along with this.

II. Romans 8:14

// As many as are led by the Spirit of God - they are the sons of God. ^{//} There is another verse very similar, to this - that emphasizes the thought. Now if any man

hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. Paul is here contrasting the life that is led by the Spirit of God. And the life that is driven by the law. I have never really seen a beautiful Christian who did not have the Spirit of Christ. This is what Jesus was talking about. When he put the emphasis on the inside of the cup. He did not want people to be praying or fasting - because the law said to pray or fast. He wanted them to pray and fast as a result of a hunger for righteousness and fellowship with God. The Publican, in the story of Jesus, went down justified. Rather than the Pharisee. Because the Pharisee's prayer received its impulse from the outside. And the Publican's prayer came from the hunger of the inside. Anyone that is led by the Spirit of Christ, must forever do these general and lovely things.

In the Reader's Digest, some years ago there was a story. It went something like this. A man put up a sign - Puppies for sale. And some people came to inspect the puppies. A boy came and suddenly, with his small voice - he said, please mister, I'd like to buy a puppy. If they don't cost too much. Well son, they are \$10. The child's face fell - I only have \$1.63. Could I look at them anyway. Sure. Maybe we can work out something. The man whistled. And a lady trotted out with five little balls of fur rolling along behind her. The boy, caught his breath, and he said -- I heard there was one with a bad leg. Yes, said the man. I am afraid that she is hopelessly crippled. That's the one - could I pay for her a little at a time. Wouldn't you rather have one that could play with you. This one will never be able to walk very well. The little boy hiked up one of his trouser legs, and showed a brace. He said, I don't walk so good either. He said, as a matter of fact, I reckon she'll need some understanding until she gets used to it as I did. So a happy little boy ^{left with puppy} and the money was not mentioned.

It isn't enough to receive Jesus Christ into our lives, and then sit down and say,

I have accepted Christ - I have opened the door. I have received him. He has forgiven me of my sins. That isn't enough. We must be led by his Spirit.

Simon Peter followed a far off. And we can follow him so far away that no one will ever know that we are sons or daughters of God.

This is the compliment to receiving him--TO them he gave the power, and the (privilege) to be led by Spirit. And become the sons of God. As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

III. NOW THE THIRD SCRIPTURE (- Hosea 1:10)

¹¹ And it shall come to pass that in the place where it was said unto them, ye are not my people, that it shall be said unto them - ye are the sons of the living God.¹¹

Something happened between those (two) clauses. That one day, ye are not my people. And then, you turn, and it says, ye are the sons of the living God.

Perhaps we could illustrate with Joni Erickson. This young lady in 1966 was 16 years old. She spent the Holiday of Thanksgiving on a fox hunt. Riding her horse at the Country Hunt Club. And then, coming in and having a wonderful time with the family, and dinner. Sometimes there are as many as 25 people, at the dining

room table. As they thanked God for the family and for all of the things. And then in 1967, the next Thanksgiving - she was in the hospital - hooked up to all kind of tubes. And in the darkness of her heart, she said, I felt it was impossible to thank God. I thought I would never thank God again. My dear mother stood over me and over the frame that held my body for hours. They would hold books for me to read - and pictures to look at. My father would come and he was so out of place in the hospital. He was so nervous because he lived out doors. I should have thanked God but I didn't that Thanksgiving Day, she said.

Another year passed - in 1968, and Thanksgiving came again. And my spirit was a little softer. And I knew there would be no more fox hunts for me. And I was home from the hospital and with the family. And after dinner, in the usual tradition, my Daddy stood up and through his tears - he said that he was so thankful that I was home. When it was my turn, I looked down at my empty plate - and then to the faces of my family, and said - I am thankful that I am sitting up in a wheel chair now. I am thankful that I don't have any more bed sores. And I don't have to go through any more operations. I am thankful that I am home for good. And I am thankful for my family - most of all, I am thankful for God and all of his blessings.

On Thanksgiving 1968, it didn't matter if I couldn't go fox hunting anymore. Or take care of my horse. It didn't matter if I could drive my car out on the farm. What mattered was that I was alive. And that I was beginning to smile and feel - Thanksgiving 1968 was far more wonderful and meaningful to me - than any other Thanksgiving I had ever had before or ever experienced.

You know, life's story of Joni is in a notion picture, now. A 45 minute film which tells about her story and growing in Christ.

She said this -- now it is Thanksgiving 1980 that is coming. And there is so much to be thankful for. And so much to praise God for. When I go back home to visit my folks, I live in California now. I know I won't feel jealous. And I can't be with my sisters riding horses or picking apples, but I thank God that he has a place for me where I am. And I am thankful that even if I can't ride a horse anymore, I can now drive a van and feel my independence. I am thankful that he has given me a place here in California among my friends. And I am thankful for the ministry which we are carrying on to help others who are hurting. Thank God who has given us an opportunity to share a grateful heart that he has cultivated within me. And I am thankful for those brothers and sisters in Christ - sons of God. And I will bless God for Jesus, because he has made possible for me to experience thanksgiving. And I have learned to give thanks always for all things, in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

This is what has happened so many many times. (We become the living) sons of God - the sons of the living God. And we find Thanksgiving.

I want to close with this incident. That happened to a wonderful old man in England. Just before his death, the editor of a New York paper flew over to visit him. They were old friends. He pulled up a chair beside the bed of the old man and propped him up on pillows, and for a few minutes - they smiled and laughed and talked together. They had had a lot of good times together.

After awhile, the news reporter said, look - one thing I never did ask you. And I want to know for it will make a good copy for my newspaper. (When) you cross over the great divide - tell me this what changed your life. You were pretty wild and reckless when you were a young man. I know - for I was with you. But something

changed us both. What changed you. Was it the experience with the Caspar sinking. Out there in the ocean and you were standing by. Their only hope.

Well, the old sea captain answered, that is where it happened. It was like this. It seemed to be impossible to get anybody off the Caspar before it broke in two. But we got them all off. A half dozen times, we almost went down ourselves. But we got them off. And the captain was the last one - when he crawled up on the deck ladder, and came over the rail of my boat, I was holding his 4 year old girl. The wife ran to him and put her arms around him and with tears streaming down her face, she said, I told you so. I told you that God talked to me just like he talked to Paul. And he told me that no body was going to be drown. All were going to get off. And then she turned to me, and said, captain, will you just keep on holding my daughter while I get down here on my knees and thank God for saving us. I told her that it was perfectly all right for her to get down on her knees and pray. For everybody on my ship had been praying. Just then the Caspar broke in two. And we stood silently and watched it sink. Then she got up. She got down on her knees and prayed. When she held out her arms to her little daughter, a moment later, that little girl just snuggled up closer to me. And I had a three or four days growth of beard, and I don't know how she stood it - but she put her cheek up to mine and said, mother, is this God? Her mother smiled and said, why no, what made you think he was God? Well, you kept saying that God would save us. This man saved us. After a moment, her mother, still smiling said - no, he is not God. He is just one of God's men. And God used him today.

The old sea captain turned to his boyhood friend, the news reporter, with a radiant light in his face. You know, I just decided that I would be one of God's men always. He could use me any day. He could use me every day if he wanted me.

That is a beautiful illustration of this verse. There was a time doubtless that God had said, both to the editor and to the old sea captain, you are not my people. But on this special day as they were talking together - surely God had smiled upon both of them. And you could almost take these words and say - you both are sons of the living God.

Sons of God can express Thanksgiving every day. Are you a son of God today? Have you truly received him? This is gratitude at its best - when a person comes and says - I want to be a son of God. Do not be a man who fails to express his thanks.