

Recognizing God's Blessings in Difficult Times

Acts 18:1-11

Introduction:

1. It is Thanksgiving weekend for our nation. If anybody on earth should understand and practice the concept of thanksgiving, it should be the Christian.
2. In Ephesians 5:20 Paul is writing to the church when he says, "*Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*"
 - In other words, thanksgiving is something that is to be intricately woven into the fabric of Christians' everyday lives. It isn't something that is relegated to a day, or weekend, or month out of the year. It is a way of life!
3. Giving thanks can sometimes be challenging. When we are going through difficult trials and problems it is very easy to lose sight of the blessings from God. Our eyes can tend to focus only on the bad and the negative. This is exactly what Satan desires us to do.
4. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 exclaims, "*In every thing give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.*"
 - **In** everything (good and bad times, in the midst of difficult times) we can give thanks to God. **Illustration:** Matthew Henry when robbed
5. Here in our text, Paul had traveled from Athens to the city of Corinth. This was a city that was synonymous with filth and wickedness. Sexual sin was embedded into its culture, and it was actually part of their pagan religion. They worshiped Aphrodite, the goddess of love. It was a metropolitan city of 200,000 residents.
6. Paul was entering into a cesspool of sin, immorality, and degradation, yet Paul knew that the gospel of Christ was the power of God unto salvation, and it could radically change the vilest of hearts.
7. It wasn't easy for Paul in Corinth. Naturally, there was opposition by Satan to the message of the gospel. It appears from the text that Paul entered Corinth low on funds, people outright blasphemed when he shared Christ, and his life was in jeopardy with people wanting to physically hurt him.
8. But despite all of this, there were so many blessings that Paul could thank God for. Because Paul focused on the blessings, he didn't quit. He remained in Corinth for a year and a half, saw many souls saved, and a local church established.
9. Like Paul, in the midst of difficult times, we can thank God:

For our needs being provided

1. When Paul arrived in Corinth, he met a couple named Aquila and Priscilla. This was an incredible blessing because Paul was of the same craft (or business) that they were – tentmaking. vs. 1-2
2. They gave Paul a job and provided him with living quarters to help provide for his physical needs while he ministered in Corinth. vs. 3

3. God has graciously provided for all of our spiritual needs by placing us in Christ. Materially, Paul told Timothy that if we have food, clothing, and shelter, we should be content. These are the basic necessities of life. 1 Timothy 6:7-8
4. No matter how difficult things may get, if we have food in our tummies, clothes on our backs, and a roof over our heads, we can lift up our heads and thank God!

For Christian friends to encourage us

1. Ever since Paul's arrival at Athens, he had walked a difficult road. The people of Athens were totally complacent to the gospel, and Corinth was a city given over to immorality. Paul was also alone, having been separated from Silas and Timothy.
2. Paul had no human companion to help and sustain him. I'm sure he was lonely and discouraged, but then God provided friendship with Aquila and Priscilla.
3. Paul began his ministry by reasoning with the Jews and Greeks in the synagogue each Sabbath Day, but no results are recorded. vs. 4
4. Can you imagine the joy that must have flooded his soul when he looked up from his work bench in Aquila's shop and saw his companions, Silas and Timothy coming toward him (vs. 5)? They also brought a monetary gift from the Philippian church. Philippians 4:15
5. Paul must have desperately needed this moral support, because right after this Paul had a renewed zeal and fervor. Paul was fired up! "*Pressed in the spirit*" means "compelled; driven." The arrival of his friends was wind to his sails.
6. Do you have Christian friends who love you, pray for you, and are there for you? Then you have something to thank God for, even in the midst of difficulties.

For God's continued presence with us

1. As was typical, when Paul began to openly declare the gospel of Christ, there was great opposition. Paul openly denounced the Christ-rejecting Jews and declared that he was done and going to the Gentiles. vs. 6
2. It must have infuriated the Jews when Paul began seeing numerous Gentile converts. Apparently, Paul must have been threatened and was afraid for his life. vs. 8
3. Perhaps Paul was about to leave Corinth, but at the precise time when Paul needed encouragement, God gave Paul His assurance that He was ever with him. vs. 9-10
4. I love it when Christ says, "*For I am with thee...*"
5. No matter how difficult things may get for the Christian on this sin-cursed earth, we have the blessed assurance that Jesus is ever with us! We can give thanks that we know that He will never leave us and never forsake us.
6. God gave us His very Spirit, and He is with us until the day of redemption. The world can take away everything in our lives, but it cannot take God's presence from us.

For doors of spiritual opportunity

1. It was quite evident that Paul's ministry and message were no longer welcome in the synagogue. What was he to do now? Again, we see blessings in the midst of difficulties. One door closed shut (the synagogue ministry), but another door opened.
2. Paul was invited by a Gentile man named Justus to conduct his ministry in his home. His home happened to be right next door to the synagogue! While using his home as a base of operations, a mighty work for God began to come into fruition.
3. God gave Paul a remarkable conversion of a man named Crispus. vs. 8
 - This seemed to open a floodgate of new converts. Paul's ministry was now flourishing and thriving.
4. Can you imagine if Paul would have focused on all the negative things that were going on back in verse 6 and said, "Well, I guess God is done with me here. God has closed all the doors." What a tragedy it would have been for all those lost souls that ultimately got saved.
5. There is a great danger in allowing ourselves to focus on material losses and physical difficulties, because we can fail to see the spiritual work that God has for us to accomplish, and the lives He has for us to impact.

In Conclusion:

1. Have you ever heard the old song, "Count Your Blessings?" It says, "Count your blessings, name them one by one. Count your blessings, see what God has done. Count your blessings, name them one by one. Count your many blessings, see what God has done."
2. I think the hymn-writer understood a key biblical truth, didn't he?
3. Even in the midst of difficult times, there is so much we can thank God for. Let's determine that we are going to be thankful people 365 days per year!