

## REASON TO BE GRATEFUL

Continuing with our November series “**FOREVER GRATEFUL**” I remind you that last week I offered this definition: Biblically speaking, **to be grateful** is to be “*full of feelings of joyful satisfaction which will overflow into expressions of praise for the One who has blessed us.*” Today, I ask you to consider that we have “**Reason**” to be grateful.

Most of us get pretty excited about **sales, coupons, and discount codes**. We like Kohl’s Cash and Menards’ Rebates. We are approaching what is considered by many to be the greatest holiday in America - “*Black Friday.*” The very name sounds ominous, but for 1000’s of shoppers, it is anything but. It rivals the land rush of the 1800’s when people lined up their horses and wagons and carts anticipating the signal to race westward to stake their claim on prime property. Now, rather than land, it’s flat screen TV’s, computers, or game consoles – furniture, clothing, and appliances – etc.

At least some of you have heard how my wife and daughters, and my sister joined the crowd to storm the stores on Black Friday several years ago. They got some fantastic deals buying gifts for loved ones on their Christmas list. In fact, they had our little Vibe loaded down with packages when they joined their hubbies for dinner that evening at a restaurant. When we returned to the car afterward, we found it had been broken into and cleaned out. It was all gone. Thankfully, insurance covered 80% of the cost of the items...but remember, they had all been greatly discounted. There was no way to replace the stolen items for the prices we’d paid. We were thrilled when the stores discounted the items, but not when the insurance company did.

This prompts me to ask a question: Do we **count our blessings or DISCOUNT them** especially if we have little to nothing invested? Do we devalue a gift we’ve received if we think it cost little to nothing? When my wife Nina and I were dating, I opened a new savings account at the local bank. For doing so, they offered a choice of gifts; the more you deposited, the more valuable the gift. I had the choice of several things but decided on a pendant watch for Nina. She was thrilled with it at first, but when I told her how I came by it, her countenance changed. If it had cost me nothing, it just wasn’t worth as much to her. To be honest, I didn’t get that at first, even offering the defense that it cost me \$5000 dollars since that was how much I’d transferred to my savings. Get that? Into my savings? Not quite the same as spending it on her, is it?

I’ve often seen folks depreciate the value of gifts in a host of ways. If there’s not been a substantial personal investment made of time or money or effort, we don’t tend to attach much value to the gift. Of course, there are notable exceptions to this. One might be that we esteem the giver enough to be touched by the fact that they thought enough of us to give us anything at all. Another is when we realize how badly we needed that which is given to us. Which leads me to remind you of Paul’s words to the Ephesians: “**For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast.**” (2:8-9) God cared enough about us to give us His Only Son – and whether we realize it or not, we desperately needed Him. Yet, I’m afraid we may sometimes discount the value of this precious gift.

Why? Could be for many reasons, but in my personal experience I find it’s usually because people don’t think they need the gift. Their sin is no big deal. They can handle it. They’ll just work harder and by doing so they’ll cancel out their bad deeds with good ones. They’ll earn God’s acceptance.

It doesn't work that way. It can't work that way. Others don't want to be indebted to anyone – especially God. One man once told me “*I didn't ask God to send Jesus, so why should I accept His gift?*” All I could think to say was “*Because you need it!*”

Some have trouble being on the receiving end. I confess that it's often hard for me to accept generous gifts. Maybe it's my pride. Maybe it's because I know I don't have the ability to reciprocate – adequately repaying those who have given so much to me. Yet, ***God's been working on me.***

Sometime ago I tried to refuse an anonymous donor who wanted to pay a debt for me. I relayed through the mediator that I didn't want anyone to have to bear my burden, stressing it was my responsibility and I was taking care of it. The reply came back that, in effect, the benefactor not only insisted, but it was a done deal. I literally broke down and wept. It's not that I wasn't grateful – but I was both humbled and overwhelmed. Nina and I sent a thank you card through our go-between – and she addressed it to “*One who paid a debt they did not owe.*”

One of our members and I were talking after last week's lesson about how even though we are to be grateful for “*the Eucharist*” - the cup of thanksgiving – we can get teary eyed because communion reminds us of God's gift on the cross. Thinking of all that God has done for me in Jesus, that. He paid a debt He did not owe -that I can never repay, makes me so grateful that I can't help but cry. And though the devil may send his demon debt collectors to harass me, I don't owe him a thing. My debt has been forever cancelled.

***Once*** when being confronted for allowing a woman with a checkered past to serve Him, Jesus responded: ***“Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?”*** Simon replied, ***“I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled.”*** / ***“You have judged correctly,”*** Jesus said. (Luke 7:41-43)

When we don't see the price tag on our sins, we can discount the value of God's gift. Whenever we give someone a gift, we usually remove the price tag. We don't want them to know how much it cost. Maybe we got it on sale, or maybe we don't want them to know how generous we were. We often include gift receipts these days, in case the present needs to be returned. Even then, they usually don't have the price we paid listed.

I'm afraid we have made the mistake of removing the price tag from our sins. People have no concept of how much God paid to redeem them. We may not be able to reattach the price tag, but we can scan the barcode.

Speaking through the prophet Isaiah, the LORD said, ***“Come now, let us reason together. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”*** (Isaiah 1:18) So, what do you say?

***Let's reason together this morning. Don't we have reason to be grateful?***

Close with prayer