

## REASONS FOR THANKFULNESS

We have much to be thankful for—we do not always realise how much. It is well to stir ourselves up in this matter. David sets us the example in the beautiful 103<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, and in other places. He calls upon all that is within him to thank and praise the living and eternal source of all things.

*“Forget not all His benefits,”* exclaims he.

Recall them to memory. It is good to do this, both for our own comfort and God’s glory. It is not the gush of mere pietism as some esteem it. It is an act of reason, conferring benefit on ourselves and yielding pleasure to God.

What cause for thankfulness we have in being able to be here. We feel this when something happens to interfere with it. We might be like the brother who last week was well and hearty and going about his daily vocations, but today languishes on a bed of pain from the effects of accidentally putting his leg through a hole in the floor. How thankful he would be to be here this morning in his usual way. So thankful ought we to be without the languish and the pain. How thankful we ought to be that the Lord required this weekly memorial of his death at the hands of his disciples *“until he come.”*

How difficult it is to keep him in memory in the midst of the hubbub and turmoil of secular life, we all know. How impossible it would have been, if there had been no coming together, to call him to mind in this special way. The longer we live, the more clearly we see this. There are few faithful believers now with all the helps we have, but had it depended upon individual memory from individual reading, there would scarcely have been a Noah. If we are wise, we shall be among those who prize the weekly memorial of the Lord’s death, and who allow nothing controllable to prevent their presence. It is a bad sign when attendance is slack here. Spiritual death has commenced when a man can easily excuse himself for being absent from the Table of the Lord. Give it a high and honourable place in the economy of your lives. We may be sure it is pleasing to the Lord, who sees everywhere, that we thus confess him before men, and thus render him the homage of our heart and lips. Labour to make it a time of refreshing—a season of comfort. Banish all questions that lead the mind into secular or debatable channels. Rigidly exclude business from the Sunday meetings. Let the day be devoted to those high and holy things, on which it is difficult for our earth-gravitating minds, in the best of circumstances, to lay hold.

And how thankful we ought to be that the Lord has so arranged that we can have his own very words to feed on at such times. Consider how poorly off we should have been had we had to depend upon church and clerical utterances for our ideas of Christ. We could not have known him; we must have remained ignorant of his will. Hope must have been quenched in the fog and darkness that prevail in the world; character must have been dwarfed and blighted, either by the deadening effect of superstition or the sterilising effects of mere secular activity. There is nothing to feed or enlighten in the effusions of the pulpit platform or press under clerical control. We would have starved to death on the miserable husks served out to the public on the right hand and on the left.

Instead of this, we have God’s own Book—Christ’s own words—the Spirit’s own undiluted and unadulterated ideas, which fatten the soul and mind as with marrow, and gladden the heart as with wine. To this feast of fat things God Himself invites in words of powerful appeal:

*“Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters: and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk, without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread,*

*and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto Me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.”*

To those who are not enlightened in the matter, this will sound mere rhapsody. The fault is in themselves—perhaps incurably so, for there are those whose hearts are “*waxed gross and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed,*” as in the case of Israel. Either they have no discernment of man’s true need, or they have no appreciation of the Bible scheme of things as a remedy, or they have no faith in that scheme from having no knowledge, or they have no love for knowledge through the love of other things entering in, or they have such a love of themselves and such a love of “*pleasure*” as distinct from wisdom and duty that their mental atmosphere is as a dense yellow fog through which the light of truth cannot shine. In all such cases, the ardent language of divine invitation will not only seem over-wrought, but without value or meaning.

Well, we must arm ourselves against the influence of such. If we cannot open their eyes to the glorious light, let us at least refuse to allow them to put any bandages on our eyes. As Peter says,

*“Beware lest we be led away with the error of the wicked and fall from our own steadfastness.”*

There is no exaggeration in the words of divine invitation and assurance. We do not require to see the happy, cloudless day of God’s promise to be sure on this point, or to feel the goodness of the feast that God has spread for us in the Word of His Truth. All men will see it then. But we are made to feel it now in the perfect satisfaction that comes with the Truth believed and obeyed. It is what Jesus calls “*my peace,*” which, also he says, “*The world cannot give.*” Some people add, “and which the world cannot take away.” This is not true. The world cannot give “*the peace of God that passeth all understanding, filling the heart and mind,*” but it may take it away, as many have found in the generations since Christ’s days who have been “*overcome.*” If we tire of the battle and give in to the world’s assaults, or, otherwise, its seductions, our peace will flee, and we shall be “*pierced through with many sorrows*”—“*the sorrow of the world which worketh death.*” But if we prove victors in the conflict, then the peace that God gives is an enduring peace—not necessarily a peace that excludes trouble. Jesus expressly discriminates here:

*“These things I have spoken unto you that in me ye might have peace; in the world ye shall have tribulation.”*

But the peace we have in Christ is so great and deep that it enables us to endure the tribulation. Its power is all needed sometimes. Tribulation is often very sore. Paul himself speaks of being “*pressed above measure, despairing even of life, troubled on every side . . . perplexed . . . persecuted . . . cast down.*” Even the Lord said,

*“My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.”*

All the prophets are more or less examples of the same thing. Their experience of the Word was fitly symbolised by the figure in which Ezekiel and John ate a little book which was sweet in the mouth, but bitter and vexing to the spirit in its after effects. It is the experience of all who, to any true purpose, embrace the Word of God as their true portion in life—first sweet, then bitter without the sweetness departing. The Truth itself is a pure and perfect and good thing. There is nothing but sweetness and rapture in its relation to our understanding and hope, and to our standing with God. This sweetness cannot depart. Where the bitterness comes in, is in the effect it produces with reference to the state of things at present prevailing among men. It creates antipathies in our own mind where there were formerly affinities. It makes us strangers where we were formerly at home; it excites enmity where we formerly had esteem and love. The language of the Psalm exactly defines the case:

*“I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien to my mother’s children. For the zeal of Thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached Thee are fallen upon me.”*

These things are not pleasant but the reverse. But they are inevitable and have to be borne and will be borne by all true men and women for the perfection of the Spirit state. It is only for a short time. It can only last a lifetime, and that is soon over. Endless time went before; endless time follows; our human life is but a tick of the clock by comparison. It is easy to endure when the mind is open to the facts of the case as they are, and when we realise that the endless time that is coming is a time for the glory of God in perfect effulgence, in which we shall bask in everlasting delight in the joy of God and all His perfected children.

We have not exhausted the causes of thanksgiving. Not only have we this priceless treasure in the contents of the Word of God, but we have liberty to avail ourselves of it to the fullest. Our long usage of freedom may have taken off the edge of our gratitude somewhat in this respect. It is helpful to remember that there was a day, and that not so long ago, when we might not read the Bible as we now do, when we might not even possess the Bible. It seems incredible to us that there ever could have been such a day in England, but so it was. Such meetings as we now hold would have been impossible. We should have had to steal a furtive assembly in the woods or some hidden place, with the constant danger of our meeting being broken up by dragoons. As for the things we teach, they would have exposed us to certain imprisonment and death at the hands of a cruel clergy. Even Calvin, in another land, burnt Servetus at the stake for doctrines that were more like the Truth than his own. How thankful we ought to be for our liberty.

Let our thankfulness take the right shape. We may fall into the mistake of many of our shallow-minded nineteenth-century friends, who imagine that the possession of “religious liberty” is due to the superiority of the current generation. We are indebted to the providence of God direct, and not to the excellence of contemporary man at all in the matter. If the clergy had the power, they would do now as they did then. As a class, they manifest the same arrogance and malignity towards objectors that led their forefathers to imprison and burn heretics. God has put limitations on their power in the operations of His providence, and to this only are we indebted for our freedom. He has set class against class, faction against faction, as the time has drawn near for the undermining of the position of the Man of Sin in Europe. He has so regulated the antagonisms and collisions of the various political and ecclesiastical parties, and especially in England in recent centuries, that they have been obliged to come to a compromise of mutual toleration. “Religious liberty” has come to be a war cry with politicians; and by this has been secured a breathing time for the Truth. In this the earth has helped the woman as appointed long ago. To God be the praise, and not to “our glorious ancestors” or our “splendid constitution” at all. “*God ruleth in the kingdoms of men,*” and will in due time set them all aside when they have served His purpose.

How thankful we ought to be for an unchained Bible, and for liberty to “*keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus Christ*” which we read therein. Does the ground of thankfulness stop here? Far from it. This is a land of Bibles without being a land of light. Multitudes have no knowledge of it, though it is in their houses, or, at least, within their reach. Other multitudes know it a little without having any care for it. Others know and appreciate, but do not understand. Some understand a little without much thoroughness of knowledge or appreciation. If in any degree, we know, understand and love this emancipated and freely circulated Book of God, have we not in this one of the greatest causes for gratitude? Here, also, let us take care how we think about it. Let us not make the mistake of supposing it is owing to any discernment or deservings we possess above our neighbours. If we have attained to the enviable position of understanding the most wonderful and most precious book under the sun, it is the result of circumstances with the ordering of

which we had nothing to do. If God had not raised up in this century such a man as Dr. Thomas, our generation would have been stumbling on in the inherited fogs which have entirely hidden the teaching of the Bible from view, while glorifying the Bible itself in a certain sentimental way. It does not appear that the understanding of the Bible has been attained in any other channel. There is a deal of writing about the Bible, and a deal of smattering in connection with separate and scattered points involved in Bible things; but where, outside of his work in our day, is to be found that complete mastery of the whole Scriptures, from Genesis to Revelation, which renders the work of God through Israel from the beginning a consistent, connected, and progressive thing, which not only does not require the help of human philosophy, but which cannot endure the admixture of it without being spoiled? We know not its like in any current system or movement, or in any library treasures, ancient or modern, or in the hands of any teacher or institution of modern life anywhere. If others know of it, we should be delighted to be introduced—with the liberty, however, of thorough independent inspection. We know enough of shams and echoes and abortions to make us very chary.

We have to be thankful, then, that God has not only given us an unchained Bible, with liberty to read and follow it, but that in the providentially-regulated work of Dr. Thomas, he has removed the mountains of tradition and fable which had gathered over it, and made it possible for us to attain an understanding of it. We have to be thankful also that we have been brought into contact with that work. We might have remained outside the circle of it. We might never have heard of it. We might have wandered on in the endless bogs of pulpit theology, to drown in the turbid waters of worldliness, or perish in the brain-softening malaria of benighted pietism, or sink in the quagmires of agnosticism, or dash our brains out at the foot of the precipices of atheism. If we have been brought into saving relation with the hope of Israel, it has been the result of some apparently trivial circumstance of personal experience. We have met a friend, or seen a book, or heard a conversation, or attended a lecture. The trivial circumstance has ended in our complete enlightenment. Ought not this to excite our gratitude?

And what shall we say about the Truth itself? What about the hope that enlightens our dark future? What about the ennobling power that lifts us day by day out of our inferior selves, and draws us upwards to the eternal archetype of all excellence? What about the solution it supplies to all the distracting problems of this evil state, which bootlessly excite unenlightened men or draw them on to vain enterprises, or overwhelm them in dark billows of disappointment and despair; and, at the last, deprive them of all noble incentive, and shut them up to the mercenary refuge of individual pleasure? How inexpressible is the light shed by the Truth on the darkness of individual life. There may be tribulation with it, but there is hope and joy, and resignation and peace.

*“What thanks can we render to God for all His benefits?”*

This is Paul’s question, and best expresses the enlightened sentiment generated in the bosom of reason by the contemplation of the wonderful position we occupy this morning when thus displayed in all its elements.

A working gratitude is the most logical and best appreciated form of thankfulness everywhere. An idle thankfulness is comparable only to the *“fruitless branch.”* It is odious both to God and man. Let us show our gratitude in *“the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name,”* *“for this is the will of God concerning us;”* and let us not forget to *“do good and communicate”* (that is, convey to others), *“for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.”* And let us do this acceptably, not in fits and starts, blowing hot and cold, but with steadiness recommended by Paul when he says,

*“Be ye steadfast, unmoveable, **always abounding** in the work of the Lord,”*  
especially knowing that our labour in the case is not in vain, however much it  
may appear so.

Taken from: - “Seasons of Comfort” Vol. 2 Pages 343-349 By Bro. Robert Roberts