

Thankfulness in Troubled Times

Gail Allwine

Recorded on February 17, 2024

I think we would all agree that we are living in very troubled times. There are some key verses that tell us why we are where we are and in that situation. I'd like to start with Romans 1:20, which is a very popular scripture.

Romans 1:20 *For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,
21) because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.
22) Professing to be wise, they became fools ... (NKJV)*

It seems so obvious that we have seen all that God has made—we are part of, part of His creation. To see all of this around us and not really realize what has happened is kind of incredible. We've come to see the incredible design far beyond what we could imagine of the design of the human body and this environment that has been made for us, perfect in every way. To me it's incredible that people can't see it, but there is a reason for that. That blindness is also from God. Turn to Isaiah 29:13.

Isaiah 29:13 *Therefore the Lord said: "Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths And honor Me with their lips, But have removed their hearts far from Me, And their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men,
14) Therefore, behold, I will again do a marvelous work among this people, A marvelous work and a wonder; For the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, And the understanding of their prudent men shall be hidden." (NKJV)*

It really is a marvelous thing that God has blinded mankind. Another scripture is in Matthew 13:13. The apostles had asked Jesus why He spoke in parables.

Matthew 13:13 *Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.
14) And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, And seeing you will see and not perceive;
15) For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them. ' (NKJV)*

It is actually part of God's plan that this world, at this time, should be blind. Blind so that man can really see what the world is really like without God. Going our own way and seeing the result of going our own way. As Christ said in Matthew 15:14, we're all going

to fall into the ditch—mankind is—by us going our own way. When God shows us God’s way versus man’s way, it’s going to be such a fantastic enlightenment that that will be the lesson.

As a result, the world is closing in on us. We’re looking at some very terrifying times that are coming as man goes his own way. We’ve read many times, Matthew 24, but I’ll turn there again.

Matthew 24:21 *For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.*

22) And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened. (NKJV)

God does promise protection. We’ve read many times in Psalm 91—I’m going to read a bit more of that.

Psalm 91:1 *He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.*

2) I will say of the LORD, “He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust.”

3) Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler And from the perilous pestilence.

4) He shall cover you with His feathers ... (NKJV)

This reminds me of what Christ said about Jerusalem. He wanted to take the people under His wings like a mother hen would, but they would not. That’s what is happening. God wants to cover us if we are willing.

4 continued) ... And under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler.

5) You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, Nor of the arrow that flies by day,

6) Nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, Nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday.

7) A thousand may fall at your side, And ten thousand at your right hand; But it shall not come near you. (NKJV)

We’re going to see these things happen. We’re going to see all these people killed all around us.

8) Only with your eyes shall you look, And see the reward of the wicked.

9) Because you have made the LORD, who is my refuge, Even the Most High, your dwelling place,

10) No evil shall befall you, Nor shall any plague come near your dwelling;

11) For He shall give His angels charge over you, To keep you in all your ways.

12) In their hands they shall bear you up ... (NKJV)

You can read more of that, but there is going to be death and destruction around and we're going to see that and it's going to be very difficult times. It's going to be hard not to be engulfed by fear when we see all of it happen. So staying close to God really is something we have to maintain. We're told so often that staying close to God requires prayer, Bible study and these certainly are of the utmost importance. But I think there is something that is also of utmost importance and a mental tool that we need to be making use of. That tool is thankfulness. That leads me to my title today.

Thankfulness in Troubled Times

It's hard to be negative when we are truly thankful, no matter what is going on around us. If we can maintain a thankful attitude, we can maintain ourselves through this time. Thankfulness is an important defense among many problems. There was a recent study at a university involving about 300 adults who were undergoing mental counseling for depression and anxiety problems. One group was given an extra assignment to write one letter of gratitude each week to someone. At the end of the counseling, this group which wrote the gratitude letters showed a significant improvement compared to the rest of the group. Thankfulness really does have an effect on our minds and is an important tool.

Considering what God has given us and what He's doing for us, I think it's hard not to be thankful to God. I made up a list of things we can and should be thankful to God for and I encourage you all to do the same.

1. God is there.

When I start my prayer in the morning, I generally start by thanking God that He's there and is who He is. If God wasn't there, we would be nothing. We wouldn't be here, there would be no life, no world, no creation. Acts 17:24.

Acts 17:24 *God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.*

25) Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.

26) And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings,

27) so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;

28) for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' (NKJV)

So, God is the source of life, He is the source of everything. Without God there would be nothing.

2. God is in control.

I think that's very important. If He wasn't, it would be a pretty pitiful existence we would have to look forward to. Turn to Psalm 135:6.

Psalm 135:6 *Whatever the LORD pleases He does, In heaven and in earth, In the seas and in all deep places.*

7) He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; He makes lightning for the rain; He brings the wind out of His treasures. (NKJV)

3. God is all powerful.

I think it was made quite clear when God was talking to Job, in Job 36:22.

Job 36:22 *Behold, God is exalted by His power; Who teaches like Him?*

23) Who has assigned Him His way, Or who has said, 'You have done wrong'? (NKJV)

Continuing in Job 38:1.

Job 38:1 *Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said:*

2) Who is this who darkens counsel By words without knowledge?

3) Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me.

4) Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding.

5) Who determined its measurements? Surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it?

6) To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone,

7) When the morning stars sang together, And all the sons of God shouted for joy? (NKJV)

God made the world and everything in it. He is all powerful. Ephesians 6:10.

Ephesians 6:10 *Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.*

11) Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. (NKJV)

God is all powerful and that power is available to help us when we are in need.

4. How about life?

I read Acts 17—God is there and gives us life. We need to be thankful for our physical lives. God has given them to us but we have to realize that it's a necessary step toward God's Kingdom. It's a necessary step at our education. I think we as human beings, sometimes put a little bit too much confidence in physical life. Physical life was designed to be a temporary phase. God says we are like a flower that fades and is gone. We are

given a certain number of years. Eternal life is the goal and this physical life is a step towards that.

5. God's Spirit.

God gives His spirit to teach us. Luke 11:9.

Luke 11:9 *So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.*

10) For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

11) If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish?

12) Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" (NKJV)

Turn to John 14:26.

John 14:26 *But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. (NKJV)*

God's Spirit really does two things. My next two topics are "knowledge" and "truth".

6. God's Spirit gives us "knowledge".

Proverbs 1:7 *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, But fools despise wisdom and instruction. (NKJV)*

Proverbs 2:6-9.

Proverbs 2:6 *For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding;*

7) He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly;

8) He guards the paths of justice, And preserves the way of His saints.

9) Then you will understand righteousness and justice, Equity and every good path. (NKJV)

God, through the Holy Spirit, provides knowledge. Just as He said, the Holy Spirit can open our minds to things that the spirit of man really can't see.

7. God's Spirit opens up "truth" to us.

John 8:31 *Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.*

32) And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (NKJV)

The Holy Spirit can set us free from all the false doctrines of this world. Notice John 16:13.

John 16:13 *However, when He [it], the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.* (NKJV)

God's Spirit which He gives us—He really can give us in our minds things that we wouldn't have otherwise.

8. Protection is another point.

We need to be thankful that God does provide protection. I read some from Psalm 91 but let's look at Psalm 34:4.

Psalm 34:4 *I sought the LORD, and He heard me, And delivered me from all my fears.*

5) They looked to Him and were radiant, And their faces were not ashamed.

6) This poor man cried out, and the LORD heard him, And saved him out of all his troubles.

7) The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him, And delivers them. (NKJV)

So, there is another side to God's protection, because God does allow us to go through trials—sometimes, very severe. Only God knows how severe a trial needs to be to teach us the things that He knows we need to learn. God gave a very severe trial to Abraham when He told him to sacrifice his only son. At the very end God intervened, but not until the very end. He had plans for Abraham and for what He wanted Abraham to accomplish. God knew he required that amount of a trial to the very end.

God does provide trials. God is not going to make a spirit being out of someone who is going to be a spoiled brat. Trials are important. Trials really are something to be thankful for. Look at Hebrews 12:5.

Hebrews 12:5 *And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;*

6) For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives."

7) If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?

8) *But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.*

9) *Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? (NKJV)*

There was a professor at Carnegie Mellon University, Randy Pausch, and he gave a lecture which filled the internet. The title was, "The Last Lecture". The theme was, if you had one last lecture to give before you died, what would it be? It was fitting in this case because he was dying of cancer and only had a short time to live. In the lecture he talks about his childhood dreams. One was to play in the National Football League. In college, football was hard for him. An assistant coach came over to him one time and said:

"Coach Gram rode you pretty hard, didn't he? It's a good thing. If you were screwing up and he didn't say anything, that means he's giving up on you".

If we're not having trials, that means something is wrong. We need to be thankful for our trials. I think God has been very gentle with me so far, which worries me sometimes because He knows what I need to go through. I would like to turn to 1 Corinthians 10:13.

1 Corinthians 10:13 *No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. (NKJV)*

I witnessed this several times—many times—in my life. I've had trials that have come and things just worked out. I've had a definite feeling that someone was watching out for me spiritually. The scripture I like is in Hebrews 1:13-14.

Hebrews 1:13 *But to which of the angels has He ever said: "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool"?*

14) *Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation? (NKJV)*

I do believe in guardian angels. I think I've had the feeling many times that someone was watching over me. I've pondered it many times. Even when I was an ornery little kid, I had that feeling. When I became an ornery adult, I still had that feeling and wondering just how God appoints spirits—angels—to watch over us. I hope someday to even meet the angel that may have been watching over me at times. It might be kind of embarrassing to find out what I did and how he intervened. It's something to be thankful for because it does appear that God is watching out for us and appointing angels to watch over us.

Society has really forgotten how to be thankful for God. But we can't be. You can't be a Christian and not be thankful. It's something we can't let slip. As Christians we have so many things to be thankful for. One scripture is Ephesians 5:19.

Ephesians 5:19 *speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, 20) giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ ... (NKJV)*

Paul is speaking of all people and what he went through. He was shipwrecked three times, stoned and beaten with rods five times, 40 stripes save 1, chased from city to city. Even with all these trials, he still says to be thankful for all things at all times. I think we could cap this off in Psalm 107:8.

Psalms 107:8 *Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness, And for His wonderful works to the children of men! (NKJV)*

Someday everyone will know God and will be truly thankful. In the meantime, being thankful to God is a tool that we really have to make use of as we see these times that are coming ahead that are going to be a trial for us. We have to make it through and as we maintain a thankfulness to God, we can make it through these times and anything that comes.