



Empowering People to Change the World

The Power of Praise and Thanksgiving

Joey Follett

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Good morning! My name is Joey Follett, and I am the Youth Pastor here at The Road. It is great to be with all of you this morning. I hope you and your family had a wonderful Thanksgiving. Before we get started, would you pray with me?

Before I became a Youth Pastor, I was a U.S. History teacher. So I would be remiss if I didn't take a quick opportunity to talk about the first Thanksgiving.

- And I promise that this both relates to this morning's message and sets up the message.

Four hundred and five years ago, a group of one hundred and two people set sail in a ship called the Mayflower towards New England.

- About half of them were separatists who were seeking religious freedom.
- They spent about two months on a ship in the middle of the ocean.
 - Terrible conditions (Hot, sick, .etc.)
 - Thought of two months without seeing land terrifies my wife, Alleigh

They left in September and arrived in the Massachusetts area in November of 1620. They actually spent most of that first winter aboard the Mayflower.

- It was tragic.
- About half of them survived, and only five of those half were women.
- Most died due to lack of food, the cold, and disease.
- Terrible beginning.

In April, the Mayflower went back to England, and the pilgrims were forced to settle inland. Thanks to the help of the local Wampanoag tribe, and specific English-speaking natives like Squanto and Samoset, the Pilgrims learned how to hunt, fish, and farm the land.

- This resulted in a successful harvest in the fall of 1621 (sometime between September and November).

- To celebrate the successful harvest, the Pilgrims and Natives enjoyed a 3-day Thanksgiving celebration.

Today, when we talk about this story and remember the Pilgrims, I think we skip over just how bad and hard it was.

Imagine with me for a minute what it would have been like to be there in 1621, in the middle of a harsh New England winter, with little food, loved ones are sick and dying. On the surface, a three-day Thanksgiving celebration sounds excessive. Does it not?

But when you consider just what they overcame. It makes sense. It actually doesn't seem long enough. Even through the struggles, they did not lose faith. And they remember to give thanks when the good comes.

- I wonder, in the midst of their suffering through that first winter. Did the Pilgrims question everything? Did they ask themselves why?
- What was their why?
- Their why was the desire for the freedom to worship how they pleased and how they felt led. Religious freedom.
 - Something they didn't have in England.
 - Something we may take for granted today, but something these men and women were willing to risk their lives for.

They were willing to leave everything they knew behind and head straight into the unknown.

- Recognizing your why is important.
- It's motivating. The Pilgrims had a powerful one.

So this morning, we are going to continue to talk about worship. We are also going to discuss gratitude and thanksgiving. And the powerful connection between the two.

We are going to talk about how we should respond to our circumstances. And to do that, we are going to look at one of my favorite historical figures: The Apostle Paul.

Please turn in your Bibles with me to Acts 16.

- Paul seemed to understand the power of praise and gratitude.

Paul often wrote about thanksgiving and gratitude. Often!

Almost all of Paul's letters open that way.

- 1 Corinthians 1:4 *"I give thanks to my God always..."*
- Ephesians 1:16 *"I do not cease to give thanks..."*
- Philippians 1:3 *"I thank my God..."*
- Colossians 1:3 *"We always thank God..."*
- 2 Thessalonians 1:3 *"We ought always to give thanks to God..."*
- Philemon v. 4 *"I thank my God always..."*

In most of these examples, Paul is giving thanks to God for the people he is writing to and for what the Lord is doing in his life and their lives.

- Paul seemed to have a heart posture of gratitude and praise.

We also know that Paul spent time in worship. Sometimes in strange places.

Acts 16 is an example of that.

- We are going to pick up the story in verse 20.
- Earlier in the chapter, we read that Paul and Silas were led by the Lord to Macedonia.
- They were doing some amazing things with the power of the Holy Spirit. Really seeing the Lord move.
- A slave girl who was possessed by a demon started following Paul and Silas.
- The girl was yelling about who Paul was and who he was serving, and in verse 18, we read that Paul became annoyed. He didn't need a demon speaking on his behalf, so he turned around and cast the demon out in the name of Jesus. The demon left.

Let's start reading in verse 19.

Acts 16:19-24

"But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities."

²⁰ And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, “These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city;

²¹ and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe.”

²² Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods.

²³ And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely.

²⁴ Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.” (Acts 16:19-24)

- The owners of this girl had been profiting off the demon possessing her. They were taking advantage of her and making money off her with little care that this poor girl was possessed by a demon.
- So naturally the owners became angry and got the crowd stirred up, and the result was Paul and Silas being captured, stripped, beaten, and put not just in prison but the inner part of the prison with their feet fastened to the stocks. Painful.
- So Paul and Silas had just been beaten and were now sitting in very harsh conditions in a Roman prison.
- How are they going to react?

Acts 16:25

“But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.” (Acts 16:25)

Paul and Silas responded with **praise and thanksgiving**.

While in pain, while in a dark situation, they responded with prayer and worship.

Not only was this response ministering to themselves, but scripture also says the other prisoners were listening to them.

- Can you imagine what was going through their minds upon hearing Paul and Silas?
- This would have been unheard of!

How we respond is powerful. How we choose to respond to situations is powerful.

- When things get difficult, as they did for Paul and Silas, are we choosing to respond with praise and worship? Are we choosing to respond with thanksgiving and gratitude?
- Things happen when we do.

There is power in responding with praise and thanksgiving.

3 Things That Happen When We Respond with Praise and Thanksgiving

1) Strongholds Shake and Chains Loosen

Acts 16:26

- There is no doubt that the earthquake was from God.
 - Not only does geography and timing point to that, but the results do as well.
 - The foundations of the prisons shook, everyone's chains were loosened, and the door swung open.
 - This was a supernatural event from God.
 - A natural earthquake would not have that effect. The purpose of this earthquake was to release them.

When you choose to worship, when you choose to praise. When you respond that way, things shake. Things break. Chains loosen.

- Why? Because God moves.

You might not see it right away. You might not feel it right away. But it is happening.

- Paul and Silas got to see it in real time.
- There is power in praise and worship, and there is power in a grateful spirit.
- You want to see results in your life? You want to see God move?
- Do what Paul and Silas did. Hit your knees, pray, and worship.

2) Doors Open

Verse 26 says the doors of the prison were opened.

- The praise set the stage for what was about to happen.
- Paul and Silas spent time in prayer and praise, and an attitude of thanksgiving first.
- Next, God moves, frees them, and opens the doors. Yes, the physical prison doors opened, but I'm not just talking about those doors; I am also talking about open doors for ministry. Opens doors for salvation. And Paul and Silas jumped on it!
- The "normal" reaction would have been, and maybe should have been, to run.
 - The doors open, this is our opportunity! Let's go!
 - But instead, they don't move.
 - They stay right where they are, and God provides an opportunity.

Acts 16:27-35

Paul and Silas saved the keeper of the prison's life. He was about to kill himself because he knew he would be killed or put in prison himself if the prisoners left on his watch. Which is exactly what he thought was happening.

Because Paul and Silas stayed and didn't run, they saved this man's life.

- How did they know they should stay? They were listening to the Holy Spirit; they were in tune with the Holy Spirit.
 - Why? Well, the best way to be in tune with the Holy Spirit is to engage with Him. And they were just doing that. They were praying and worshipping!
- I don't know exactly what Paul and Silas were praying for. Scripture doesn't say. I do know that if I were in prison and in their situation, I would be praying that I get out of there.
 - So maybe that is what they were praying for, and if so, they got their answer.
 - But they stayed. And it led to the salvation of an entire family.

Are We Praying for Open Doors for Ministry?

- Are we grateful for open doors when they come? Or do we grumble at another thing we have to do?
- I can't stress enough how crazy it is, what Paul and Silas did.
- They should have booked it out of there. But instead, they stayed to hang out with the guy who was in charge of keeping them there!
 - Do we worry about what is comfortable or uncomfortable?
- But they trusted in the Holy Spirit and how He was leading them.

3) Provides Peace

Turn with me to Philippians chapter 4.

Something happens when we choose to praise and when we choose gratitude, something chemical in your brain.

- Did you know your brain has two halves: the Right side and the left side
- When you are practicing gratitude, when you are praising God because He is good, when you are thanking God for what you have and appreciating what he has done for you, something happens in your brain.
 - The joy part of the right side of your brain expands.
- It's impossible for gratitude and anxiety to coexist in your brain at the same time.
- Thanksgiving and praise are good for you. Good for your mental health!
- Here is the cool part - scripture supports this!

Let's look at what the apostle Paul wrote in Philippians chapter 4.

- Keep in mind, Paul wrote this from prison. (He spent a good amount of time in prison).

Philippians 4:4-9

“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, rejoice!

⁵ Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.

⁶ Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;

⁷ and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

⁸ Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.

⁹ The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.” (Philippians 4:4-9)

- Paul starts by asking people to do some difficult things in this passage
 - “Rejoice in the Lord ALWAYS.”
 - Praising and worshipping when circumstances are difficult.
 - Like being in prison.
- Times when I don’t feel like worshipping...
- Paul uses the word ALWAYS.
- God is worthy of our praise always.

We can choose to praise; we can choose to be grateful because of who HE is. Because HE is good and because He is with us.

- “Let your gentleness be known to all men.”
 - Hard times when I don’t want to . . .
- “Be anxious for nothing.”
 - Other translations say “Don’t be anxious about anything.”
 - Yeah, right! That is hard to do...
- Paul was encouraging people to do these things FROM PRISON

- Now I don't know about you... But if I were in prison right now, I think it would be hard to be joyful, gentle, and not anxious.
- But he didn't just ask people to stop doing those things; he gave instructions for what to do instead.
- Instead of being anxious, do these things – solution (Verse 6)

Bring everything in prayer and supplication. Pray about what makes you anxious.

- Burden goes up / Peace comes down

With thanksgiving

- Be thankful!
- From prison, Paul is encouraging fellow believers to practice gratitude. To be thankful.
- He isn't telling anyone to do anything he wasn't doing himself.
- Paul knew, the way to combat anxiety and the proper way to respond to circumstances is with praise and thanksgiving, because he had seen it in his own life.
- He knew that anxiety and gratitude can't exist in your mind at the same time

And he knew the result of practicing these things.

- The result comes with a promise in verse 7
- ***“The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”***

Peace that doesn't make sense, peace that guards us and guides us

- Supernatural peace.
- Peace that comes in a situation when you shouldn't have peace.

Paul shouldn't have peace in prison, but because he responded to that circumstance with praise and thanksgiving and brought everything to the Lord in prayer, he received supernatural peace from the Lord.

Paul also encourages us to focus and think about certain things; Things that are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, good, virtuous, worthy of praise.

- I love that first one . . . TRUE
- Have you noticed that anxious thoughts are usually not true? Sometimes they are kind of crazy . . .
- And (another promise) *“the God of peace will be with you.”*

Every day, we have a choice.

We Can Choose Daily How We Respond to Circumstances.

- Sometimes it is a massive challenge like that of the Pilgrims or Paul and Silas.
- Sometimes it's the daily challenges, like your boss at work, parenting, sickness, and relationship problems.

The choice is in front of us every day on how we respond.

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

Is this how we are responding to our own circumstances?

Our Circumstances Don't Determine God's Worth or Value.

God is always worthy of your worship. God is always worthy of your thanks. Because of God, we can be grateful, no matter what the circumstance is. We can be joyful no matter what the circumstances are.

We praise God and practice gratitude not just on Thanksgiving. But every day, because it's powerful, and because it bears fruit.

- And because HE is good and worthy of our praise and worship. Everyday.

Another Biblical figure who understood this was David.

- David wrote the majority of the Psalms.
 - About half of them are Psalms of praise, and about half are Psalms of lament.

- David often responded to his circumstances with praise and thanksgiving.
 - Crazy situations – like avoiding being murdered by the King of Israel.
- I encourage you to spend time with the Lord in the book of Psalms. There are countless examples.

Psalm 95

***“Oh come, let us sing to the Lord!
 Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation.
²Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving;
 Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms.
³For the Lord is the great God,
 And the great King above all gods.
⁴In His hand are the deep places of the earth;
 The heights of the hills are His also.
⁵The sea is His, for He made it;
 And His hands formed the dry land.
⁶Oh come, let us worship and bow down;
 Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.
⁷For He is our God,
 And we are the people of His pasture,
 And the sheep of His hand.” (Psalm 95:1-7)***

My challenge to you this morning, my invitation to you this morning. It is to worship God with gratitude, with thanksgiving, with joy. Come to him right now exactly as you are.

- You don't have to pretend that everything is fine.
- If you feel broken today, come as you are.
- He wants you.
- He wants all of you.
- He wants all of your heart.
- Would you stand with me? Read Psalm 100, then we will worship together.

Psalm 100

***“Make a joyful shout to the Lord, all you lands!
²Serve the Lord with gladness;***

Come before His presence with singing.

³ Know that the Lord, He is God;

It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves;

We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.

⁴ Enter into His gates with thanksgiving,

And into His courts with praise.

Be thankful to Him, and bless His name.

⁵ For the Lord is good;

His mercy is everlasting,

And His truth endures to all generations.” (Psalm 100)