

TRIUMPHANT LIVING
Taught by Dr. Bruce Bickel
Focusing on God's Power Part 3
December 13, 2013

Heavenly Father, we come into Your Presence again and thank You for Your mercy and grace. Father, we just pray that in the busyness of the season that we would not get locked up in all the trappings and all the trimmings but we would focus on the treasure in our earthen vessel, and that is the gift of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in our lives through the Holy Spirit. Father, we now pray that You would be pleased to open our eyes, direct our thoughts God-ward that we might see You more clearly for Jesus' sake. Amen.

We are continuing our study on the New Covenant, looking at 2nd Corinthians 4: and I encourage you to turn to your Bibles please. I want to pick up reading where we were the last couple of weeks to help us set the context for what we are going to study today.

Beginning at Chapter 4:7, I'm reading from the New American Standard Version. Sometimes people ask me which Bible do I use and if I'm doing a public reading I would do something from the English Standard Version as it is a more accurate word for word translation, but in my own personal study I use the New American Standard because it is what you would call a "verbal equivalent." In other words, it is word-for-word; it is not the best public reading Bible but in my mind it is the most accurate translation so I'm reading from that. Another reason I use it, is because the print is larger. {LAUGHTER}

2nd Corinthians 4:7, 13, 14 and 15 but I want you to understand the context of what verses 13, 14, and 15 teach us about life in the covenant relationship with the Lord Jesus.

So beginning at verse 7-12: "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about the body of the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death works in us, but life in you."

Now what Paul describes here is his own life. He is basically saying, "This is what my life in Christ is like." If you remember prior to Paul's conversion he had been the primary persecutor of the Church, and now he is the primary preacher for the Church. So there was a huge transition in his life, a transformation in his life; he went from being a persecutor to a preacher. There are many people who did not understand that about Paul and said, "How could he be an apostle? If he was this how can he be that?"

So he is describing his life and what it is like as a person who is following the personal work of Christ because of his conversion and his transformation in his own life. He is describing for us and in doing that he describes a picture of normal Christian living. You'll notice in Chapter 4:7 that he is describing this treasure in earthen vessels to show that the all surpassing power comes from God and not from us. Basically, this whole passage in the verses we have studied previously are teaching us that God just wants to, through the normal hassles of life, put His life on display.

Notice in verses 10 and 11 that twice he says, “the life of Jesus may be manifested in your mortal flesh.” In other words through the difficulties and problems that you and I have, which are described in verses 7 through 12, you are going to have the opportunity just to have the life of Christ come out of you by the way that you respond to the normal hassles of life. Notice how he describes them: “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; we are perplexed but not despairing; we are persecuted but not forsaken; we are struck down but not destroyed.” What he is saying is that is fairly normal. But the real issue is, what is the purpose behind all of those hassles? I call them hassles because when you are honest, we have not been really persecuted in our country for our faith, have we? We really have it quite easy compared to other people around the world. For us to say that we are being persecuted, I think, is an over-statement. I think we are being hassled and that is why I use the word “hassle.” But in the process of those hassles that we go through, God just wants to give His life away to show that the all surpassing power to just survive the normal things of life really come from the Holy Spirit and not from us.

Now in the next verses, 13, 14 and 15 he says, “But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, ‘I believed, therefore I spoke,’ we also believe, therefore we also speak.” He is giving us three reasons for his not being discouraged. There is the possibility when you look at those verses 7 through 12 that one could be discouraged and disrupted about the normalcy of your life because there are many hassles going on. So Paul says there are three ways in which he deals with the hassles of life so that he does not become discouraged. So verses 13, 14, and 15 are Paul’s solution to the possibility of being discouraged by the hassles of life. Sometimes we just don’t realize that God is giving His life away and we are still under the guise of being hassled and disrupted because of the hassles of life; but he says there is a thing that you need to do when you are discouraged and that is to focus on the power of God and then he gives us three reasons.

The first one is the power of faith. “I believe, therefore, I speak.” Verse 14 is, “...knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you.”

The second thing is the power of the resurrection. In other words, he is saying that when you get discouraged because of the hassles of life you need to focus on God’s power in three areas:

First, the power of faith. Remember, the word “believe” means to rely upon, depend upon, trust in, and adhere to. In other words you speak those things that you believe. If you believe, then you speak those things; if you don’t believe it, don’t say it. But he is saying that in the hassles of life the thing that keeps him from sinking is his faith. It is the power of faith. So he says the very first thing you need to do is focus on the power of God in your belief. Where does your belief come from? From God; therefore, you focus on the fact that you believe and you realize what? It is God’s power that took the blinders off my eyes, converted me, regenerated me, took my heart of stone and gave me a heart of flesh. That is God’s power and if you’re looking for something look at your own life and say, “I’ve got a reason to be grateful just because I do believe.” Belief is a gift; it is not something based upon your academic acumen or your eruditeness. It is based upon the function of the grace of God; so the very first thing you do before you start talking about your faith is realize it is the power of God that gave you the faith. Faith is a gift of God, it is not something you achieved on your own. It is something that you receive.

Paul says the very first thing you want to do to keep you from sinking under the pressures of life is just realize the fact that God is powerful enough to cause you to believe. Notice the word “but” a number of times? Hassled “but” not defeated. That is the power of God, so he says, “Focus on the power of God.”

The second thing he says is to think of the power of resurrection. Notice verse 14, "...knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you." He is saying, think on the power of the resurrection. There is a present resurrection and a future resurrection. The future resurrection is when the Lord Jesus returns and He takes us with Him into glory. But there is a present resurrection and what is that? New life in Christ. You are an expression of a resurrection because you were dead in your trespasses in sin...according to Ephesians 2...and now you are alive in Christ. You have experienced a present day resurrection because you believe. So he is telling us to focus on God's power in our life and not the situations in which you find yourself in life. In other words, we say, "Well, if my situation would change, everything would be fine." But he's saying that you cannot change those situations, there is a divine purpose behind them and that is God is just giving His life away through the hassles that you go through in the normalcy of life, but in the midst of your possibilities of realizing that you still may get discouraged. In those moments of discouragement, think of three things: the power of God in your faith; the power of the resurrection and as we said a couple of weeks ago the real passage on the resurrection is found in 1st Corinthians 15 and it is a great cross-reference about the resurrection.

Quickly, the resurrection confirms four things in the Scripture and so you think on the resurrection. Your present resurrection going from darkness into light, from unbelief to belief (that is a present day resurrection) but also this: the resurrection ratifies the gospel...1st Corinthians 15:1-19...it ratifies the gospel. It assures us of the Kingdom of God, verses 20-34. It harmonizes with nature, verses 35-49; and it pledges our immortality. Now that is why you focus on the resurrection. When you begin to think about the resurrection, go read 1st Corinthians 15. It is the passage of full intent. In other words, it has the most information on that particular subject of the resurrection.

So Paul says that which keeps you from sinking is your faith and the power of your faith; that which keeps you from failing is going to be the power of the resurrection. There is one more that I want to look at today as we close this section and that is this: it is the power of gratitude that prevents us from griping. The power of gratitude prevents us from griping; in other words, thanksgiving. When we focus on the situation that is going on around us, we are going to be discouraged. But when we focus on God's power in my belief, in my resurrection and now in my thanksgiving, we can manage the discouragement we have because of the situations we find ourselves.

When we do that and focus on God's power, we are reminding ourselves that God is the one who is actually in control. That is why Paul says, "in the discouragements of your life, focus on God's power." Don't focus on the consequences of the situation or the circumstances but focus on God's power. Specifically, he is saying here in our third element is to focus on gratitude because that removes the potential of griping. Gratitude is much more appealing than griping, isn't it? There is nothing worse than to hear someone griping. It is always about someone else's responsibility, somebody else's fault, or if my circumstances were different I would be OK. It is just constant griping. What Paul is saying is in the midst of your possibilities of being discouraged, think on the power of thanksgiving, the power of gratitude, because that will prevent you from griping.

Notice verses 7-12 are all for our benefit because it is the means by which we demonstrate the fact that Christ is alive in our lives.

Yes, Don?

DON: *Bruce, where do you draw the line? For example, if you're feeling discouraged...if you are suffering and you are in great pain or discouragement...where do you draw the line in praying to God...I'm feeling very bad, I'm very discouraged...where do you draw the line in griping? It seems that the Psalmist, for example, yes there was gratitude but there were also times when he just poured his heart out to God and I'm just wondering....certainly we are allowed to do that before God, right?*

Right, absolutely. Now I'm not suggesting that this is positive mental attitude and I'm not suggesting that. I'm not saying that if you think OK, everything is going to go away. I'm not saying that. If you look at 1st Thessalonians 5:18, "in everything give thanks for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." "Make our supplications known to God with thanksgiving." In other words, that's where you trust the Holy Spirit, He is our Paraclete, He is the one who comes alongside of us and we need to realize that Jesus is our intercessor according to Romans 8 and He is at the right hand of the Father interceding for us at that time. So when we pour our heart out in pain, which is perfectly permissible. We do that with the understanding that we giving this to the Lord and we are trusting Him in the midst of our pain; rather than saying, "I deserve something better."

I think, Don, where I would draw the line is beginning to think that I deserve something better as apposed to saying, "Lord, would you give me the strength to bear through this, let me give you my pain, I know you are interceding for me, I know that Christ is my intercessor at this very moment, You understand what I'm going through"...so you can pour yourself out you can say all those things rather than saying I deserve something better. I think that is the real issue that Paul is saying. Yes, you have the freedom to do that. I would also say this, in those moments of great pain the Scriptures says, " that there is wisdom in the counsel of many Brothers."

You know, there are great resources in the body of Christ and that is the man who is sitting right beside you; the man in front of you, the man behind you. Go to another Brother in Christ and just pour your heart out and allow somebody to put the salve of grace with you by praying with somebody. I think it is very important to pray with somebody in the moments of discouragement so that you keep things in balance. For me and when I am really discouraged, I try to find a Brother I can trust and I go and say, "Would you pray with me." We pray together then I just open my heart up to the Lord. But I think that is one way of protecting ourselves of not crossing the line of thinking I deserve something better than what I have. We need to realize that when we focus on God's power we are basically saying, "God has the right to rule." That does not mean we are defeated. I'm not saying that at all. The victory has already been won in the personal work of Christ. All I'm saying is can be a great benefit in praying in the midst of your pain with another person because the vulnerability is something that the ministry of the body of Christ is designed to do and that is to help take care of that.

Yes, please.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: *I think that one word that you just said in answering Don is "I don't understand" and when I'm tormented or troubled, or whatever, and I go to the Lord and I tell him, "I don't understand what is going on in my circumstances and I seek Your strength to see me through this." This way I cannot say that this is right or wrong, or whatever, but I don't understand,, "show me"...and that way I can back away from setting myself up on a pedestal in seeking God's guidance...He always comes through.*

Amen. Yes, Tom.

TOM: *Isn't this where perseverance comes in? [UNCLEAR] What do you do the next day, because there are no quick fixes.*

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: *Can I read a verse in Romans 8:26 says, "Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses when we do not know what we should pray for as we ought but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groaning which cannot be uttered." I thought that applied.*

Yes, we need to realize the intercessory work of Christ. Remember Romans 8 starts with, "No condemnation" and ends with "no separation." How can you be separated from the Love of God? In between, around verses 33 and 34 is "intercession." The reason there is no separation is because of the intercession or ministry that Christ has at the right hand of the Father. So when you come to the Father through your prayer life, even in the midst of all of your pain, Christ is basically saying, "Father, he is one of ours and let's have the grace that You've given him and the Holy Spirit minister to him in the midst of his pain." You need to realize that when you are praying, you are not just verbalizing some words on your own but you are understanding that Christ is interceding for you at that very moment because He understands exactly what you need. So come to Him with all of your pain. Absolutely.

I'm thinking of the passage in Psalms where it says something like, "Why am I downcast O my soul?"

DON: *Psalm 42.*

Psalm 42:.. Thank you Don. David gives us a wonderful illustration of this balance. No, I don't think that is the one. Basically he says, "Why am I downcast O my soul", then he says this: "My hope is in the Lord." Now what is David doing to himself? Where is it?

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: *That is Psalm 42:11.*

Now what is it? 42:11. Well, I'm in Isaiah, no wonder! {MUCH LAUGHTER} Does anyone have a larger print Bible? {MUCH LAUGHTER}

Psalm 42:5. "Why are you in despair, O my soul. And why have you become disturbed with me?" Now there is a man who is really just looking to himself and saying "I'm in a great deal of pain, I'm really disturbed." But notice his response, "Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him for the help of His presence." What is he doing to himself? He is talking to himself. Sometimes the best person you need to listen to is who? Yourself. Sometimes you just need to say...and this is what Paul is saying, "in the midst of your discouragement focus on the power of God in your faith, focus on the power of God in the resurrection, and focus on the power of God in your gratitude." In other words, talk to yourself about those three things: the power of God in your faith, the power of God in your resurrection, and darkness into light, and your future resurrection, and talk to yourself about the power of gratitude.

Yes?

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: *Isn't that something like think, act, feel?*

Yes, exactly. You have to think right, before you act right, before you feel right. My point here is Don's got a great point but sometimes we need to listen to ourselves and remind ourselves. That is what Paul is doing.

Remind yourself of the power of God in your life, and talk to yourself out loud. Now John McCain was one of my flight instructor's in Pensacola when I was in my syllabus, and he was telling me that when you land on an aircraft carrier one of the things that you want to do is talk yourself down. In other words, you have memorized your checklist. Talk yourself down, just go through it; hear yourself talking about what you need to do because the more you think about it, the sharper it is going to make your response between your hand and your eye coordination because you are talking to yourself and reminding yourself what you need to do.

That is essentially what David is doing here. Sometimes you and I need to talk ourselves...now I am not saying this is a positive mental attitude thing...what I'm saying is that Paul is teaching us in our passage today is that you want to talk to yourself about the power of God in your life; the power of God in your faith; the power of God in your resurrection; and now the power of God in your spirit of gratitude. Talk to yourself about that.

Yes, Carl?

CARL: *Bruce, in this text he has also let us know, as you just said, the power that we have...the Bible tells us that he who is in the will of God shall suffer; so we are going to go through some things, but when you are cast down remember the power that works in you because you are not destroyed, but get up again and start all over...continue to walk, continue to walk in faith. Why? Because it is the power of God that is working in you.*

Amen. Let's turn to...let me show you the power of thanksgiving. Now, my point here is this: the power of faith keeps you from sinking; the power of the resurrection keeps you from fainting; and the power of gratitude keeps you from griping. There is a difference between praying your heartfelt prayer and griping. There is a difference. What I am saying is that the power of thanksgiving prevents you from griping.

Let's go to Hebrews 13:15. I want to show you something about the power of thanksgiving. Now in the Old Testament you read much about sacrifices; it is part of the covenant relationship and is a demonstration of God's commitment to His people. There is the sacrifice of bulls, of turtledoves; the oxen, the lamb and so forth. Those were all sacrifices that were given to God to praise Him and to worship Him. I want you to see how a sacrifice now is defined in Hebrews 13:15: "Through Him..." 'Him' being Christ. "let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God..." In other words, notice this "a sacrifice of praise..." Here is the concept of sacrifice again. Now he defines it. "...that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name." In other words, what is our sacrifice now in our relationship with the Christ? It's thankfulness, it's gratitude. God views that as a sacrifice. You and I do not need to sacrifice bulls and oxen and turtledoves any more or the lamb because there was a Lamb that was slain for all of us...the personal work of Christ. That is the ultimate sacrifice. Our sacrifice to God is not animals, it is the expression of your heart of gratitude. That is a sacrifice. When you are saying "Thanks" you are sacrificing to God, you're praising God because you are showing Him that you understand the recognition and that you understand the power of God and His life in your life.

Let me read that again, "Let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise..." We think that a sacrifice of praise might be singing hymns and I'm sure that is acceptable; but notice how He defines it, He uses the phrase "that is." In other words this is how it is defined. "...the fruit of the lips that give thanks to His name." That is the expression of gratitude. Our expression of gratitude is praise to God and it is an offering that we give Him. Why is it an offering? Why is it an offering? Freely given but what is it signifying, what is an offering designed to do? Praise God. That is what they were for, to praise God. What you are doing is when you and I expressing gratitude with thanksgiving for the situations in which we find ourselves and because we are supposed to focus on the power of God and our gratitude, it prevents us from griping. You are offering up praise to Him and He receives it as a praise to Him and it is an act of worship. Do you realize that thanksgiving

is an act of worship? That is what keeps up from griping. There is nothing wrong with our going to God in great humility in prayer and begging for His mercy and compassion...that's fine and that is part of the sacrifice but we do that with thanks giving because you are focused on His power and intercessory work of Christ.

My point here is that focusing on the power of thanks giving prevents us from griping. It brings a balance in our life that we need to have.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: *That is half of it. Verse 16 gives us the other half.*

Correct. "Do not neglect doing good in sharing for such sacrifices God is pleased." When are you more likely to do a good deed? After you have expressed gratitude. What does it remind of? It gets you not thinking about yourself but you start to think about somebody else. And what is the whole purpose of the hassles of life? That God may demonstrate and give His life away. There is a wonderful cycle here in these verses.

So the first thing that David says, "Why am I downcast, O my soul...Hope in God..." Because I know in His presence...you see he is talking to himself and reminding himself of God's power in his life. That is exactly what Paul is teaching us here. Remind yourself of the power of God in three areas: the power of faith, the power of the resurrection, and the power of gratitude.

Take a look at Colossians 3:17. Does this make sense guys? There is tremendous power in gratitude and thanksgiving. "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father." Thanksgiving is a powerful, powerful antecedent for some of the things that we have in our life...the difficulties we have. It is a wonderful way and it is now the new way in which we express our praise to God through a heart of thanksgiving. It is the attitude of gratitude that we have.

1st Peter 2:5. Notice, sacrifices again. "...you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." What is a spiritual sacrifice now? Thanksgiving, thankfulness. That is the acceptable sacrifice. We do not make sacrifices anymore from bulls and goats and turtledoves because Christ was our sacrifice. Now what we do is offer a sacrifice...notice...through Him to God the Father as expression of our gratitude. That is our sacrifice; our sacrifice now is the heart of thanksgiving.

1st Peter 2:9. Here are four reasons in my mind for us to give thanks in all situations because we are told in 1st Thessalonians 5:18 "in everything give thanks..." 1st Peter 2:9. "But you are a chosen race..." The wonderful doctrine of election; thank God for that. Did you ever ask yourself the question, "Why me?" The only answer is what? God, that is the answer. There is no other answer to that than God. That is a cause for thanksgiving. It is a cause for offering up a sacrifice of worship and praise. "Thank you Father for the fact that in eternity past you chose me before the foundation of the world." It was not dependent upon what I did, it was dependent on who You are. "Just thank You that I am part of the chosen race."

The second reason is, "A royal Priesthood,,,,," Do you realize that the real body of Christ is a Priesthood? Now in our bulletin at my church in Chicago they listed me as the Pastor/Teacher and they had the minister as the congregation. The ministers were the congregation. The ministers were not the paid professionals. The ministers were the congregation...the royal Priesthood...the Priesthood of the believers. There is a great equality in the body of Christ and if you look at the chain of command in the Church of Jesus Christ, you will

see Christ up here and everyone else is on the same level; but they are different responsibilities. Different aspects of who they are and what they do; but there is an equality there.

The second thing we just need to be thankful for is that we are part of a royal Priesthood...the ones who can really minister in the name of the Lord Jesus; He is the One Who uses us now as His priests. We are His ministers; it is the congregation who are the ministers, not the ones up front.

Another cause for great thanksgiving is "A Holy Nation." Now this is referring to the body of Christ, not the USA. Do you believe, guys, that right now those of us who are **in** Christ sitting here in this little room at Christ Church, that we make up a part of "A Holy Nation?" You want the nation to be the right nation and it is "A Holy Nation" not the United States of America. I'm very grateful that we live here but it is not a holy nation. You are part of "A Holy Nation"...you are a chosen person, you are part of "a royal Priesthood," and you are part of "A Holy Nation." The great desire that we have is to be part of "A Holy Nation." Thank the Lord for that...the body of Christ.

Then lastly, how about this one? Verse 9. "A people for God's Own Possession," Do you realize that when God chose you in eternity past He chose you to be a person for His Own possession?

Think on those four things? That is bound to make you come up and say, "Lord, thank You, thank You." That friends, is a sacrifice of praise...when you focus on the power of God in your life, it causes you to offer a sacrifice and now we are defined as an expression of gratitude in your heart for what God has done.

We are "a Chosen Race, a royal Priesthood, a Holy Nation, and a People for God's Own Possession." Now, notice... "so that you pray proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;..." Brothers, that is the reason we are thankful. Yes, in the midst of our hassles we get discouraged, but focus on the power of God and our thanks giving. Offer Him a sacrifice of thanks giving and praise and watch what happens to you. Who changes when you pray? Prayer doesn't change anything, but it changes you. That is the reason for our prayer.

How about the Psalmist. Go to Psalm 50:23. I just want you to see the correlation between sacrifice and thanks giving. Take a look at this. The Psalmist says, "He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honors Me;..." When you are saying thanks what are you doing? You're honoring God when you say thanks. "And to him who orders his way aright I shall show the salvation of God." "He who offers the sacrifice of thanksgiving honors me." If you really want to honor God, just say, "Thank you." When you honor God, it keeps you from griping. When you honor God, it keeps you from complaining and gratitude is much more attractive than complaining and griping.

I think I told you about my father who years ago in my right of passage, when I was a twelve year old lad living in West Virginia, drove me up to Pittsburgh to buy me a blue suit because my dad said every man needs a blue suit. He drove me Kaufmann's at South Hills Village and I got to wear a blue suit. On the way back, I wanted to wear the suit in the car and dad said, "No, you save it for church and the first time you get to wear your blue suit as a man is next Sunday when you go to church." And I said, "Dad, does a blue suit make me a man?" He said, "No, it just makes you more attractive." {LAUGHTER} I said, "What is it that makes me a man? And he said this, "No griping, no complaining, and no blaming, and Bruce when you have that character and you wear your blue suit, you are going to be an attractive man." But what makes you a man is your character not your covering and it is this: "no griping." Don't ever want to hear you gripe but say, "thank you" because when you

understand that you are offering an honor to God when you say thanks, it will prevent you from griping. No griping, no complaining, no blaming.

Yes, sir?

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: *There is a price for griping. You have to remember that the Jews spent 40 years in the wilderness because of griping.*

That's a great point. Good illustration, that is exactly right. There is a cost to it. Thank you, Brother. Great insight. There is a great cost to griping.

When you say, "Thanks," you are honoring God and when you honor God, what happens to that? Something happens to you doesn't it, when you thank that way?

Some other good insights about sacrifice of thanksgiving. Psalm 69:30: "I will praise the name of God with song and magnify Him with thanksgiving." What does the word "magnify" mean? To increase, to enlarge. You are going to enlarge your view of God when you give thanks. Whose vision of God changes when you say thanks? Yours does, mine does. "I will praise the name of God with song and magnify Him with thanksgiving. And verse 31: "And it will please the Lord better than an ox or a young bull with horns and hoofs."

Brothers, there has been one sacrifice that is acceptable to God and that is the sacrifice of the personal work of Christ, and when you say, "Thanks" you are offering a sacrifice that in God's eyes is more honoring to Him than the sacrifice of a bull or an ox with horns; because you are calling attention to the ultimate sacrifice of the personal work of Christ. Do you see that? Thanksgiving, Brothers, is a sacrifice of praise and it changes our view of Who God is.

Yes, please.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: *You mention sacrifice of thanksgiving...tell me a little bit about sacrifice. Everything seems to be focused on thanksgiving but what about sacrifice. To me sacrifice is everything...a sacrifice of praise...what does it mean to sacrifice?*

OK. You're feeling rotten, you are really discouraged, you're downtrodden. It is a sacrifice to go from keeping your thoughts on that to keeping your thoughts on something else. You have to go through a sacrifice...you have to die to that. That's a sacrifice. In other words, I'm not going to think about this stuff any more that is going on and I'm going to sacrifice my right that I think I have to be complaining about the situation in which I find myself and I'm going to sacrifice that and not think about it and I'm going to replace it with thanksgiving. There is a personal sacrifice that you have to go through to die to the situation which you are feeling. That's a sacrifice. You replace that with a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.

Yes?

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: *We like a pity party.*

Yes, we do. We like a pity party, but there is a sacrifice there, Dean. You have to get over that sacrifice. When you sacrifice your right to feel that way...now understand what I'm saying...we have a right to feel...feelings

are neutral and they are neither positive nor negative. All I'm saying is how you manage it. The sacrifice comes in the management of not dwelling on it, and I'm going to die to it, and I'm going to change my thought pattern, and I'm going to say, "Thank you." There is a sacrifice involved personally.

Yes, Dale?

DALE: *I think in the past I have heard you refer to that as the attitude of gratitude.*

Correct. We are not motivated by guilt, we are motivated by an attitude of gratitude. Is that helpful Dean? There is a personal sacrifice because we have to die to whatever we are holding onto. That is the sacrifice.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: *Isn't it often what we are holding onto is our right to ourself?*

Yes, exactly, you surrender. That is a good word, it is a surrendering. Dying to myself and replacing it with an attitude of gratitude.

Psalm 107:21-22: "Let them give thanks to the Lord for His lovingkindness, and for His wonders to the sons of Men! Let them also offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, and tell of His works with joyful singing." You see there is the correlation between a sacrifice that is really an expression of gratitude.

Yes, Don?

DON: *It strikes me, Bruce, that David or the people who wrote the Psalms didn't have the whole picture, I mean they could praise God for what He did in delivering the Israelites from Egypt; but how much more do we have what Christ has done?*

Did you hear what Don just said? The Psalmist had just a glimpse of the glory of the Lord, we have the full revelation of it now. How much more we ought to be motivated by gratitude than the Psalmist writer. They only had a half of the picture. They were anticipating something, we have received something. That is the sacrifice of the personal work of Christ for which we now say, "Thank you" in every situation we have.

Great point, Don.

How about Psalm 116:17: "To you I shall offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving and call upon the name of the Lord." See, when you are really hurting offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving and call upon the name of the Lord. That is exactly what David did when he said, "Why am I downcast O my soul? My hope is in the Lord." Put my hope back in the Lord.

What Paul is teaching us in our passage today, Brothers, is this. Yes, it is very likely that you are going to be discouraged because of the hassles of life, that is normal. Don't think that you are less spiritual when you are discouraged, I am not saying that at all. Remember, feelings are neutral...they are neither positive nor negative. The question is, how do I manage them? You have to recognize that the feelings you are having and then the question is, how do I manage them? That is where you begin to transform the way you are thinking. You begin to think right, you begin to act right, and you begin to feel right.

So Paul says in those moments of discouragement, the panacea is this: think on the power of God in three specific areas: the power of your belief—what a gift that is. Do you realize that, Brothers? That is a gift that God gave you...to even have the ability to believe. It is not something you earned or something that you achieved. It is something that you got in God's grace...just thank Him for the fact that I can read the Scripture and I do believe. Secondly, think of the power of the resurrection; you have experienced the present day resurrection of being transformed from the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of the Son He loves. You have gone from darkness to Light. You have experienced a personal resurrection. Just thank Him for that. And you anticipate a future resurrection when the Lord returns in all of His glory. And the third thing is this: just think on the power of thanksgiving. Think of the power of being grateful, what Ted taught us last week. The power of gratitude. The power of being grateful because that is a sacrifice of praise that honors the Lord. Whenever you say "Thank you" God is honored. We talk about everything we do for the glory of God to honor Him...it starts with our personal sacrifice of thanksgiving...no griping, no complaining, no blaming; just an attitude of gratitude.

Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for the clarity of our Brother Paul teaching us the normalcy of life, but also being a man of great logic; he understood that we would be discouraged and so he gives us a means by which we can manage our discouragement and that is to focus on the power of God in our lives. May it be so, Father, that we will offer You sacrifices of praise for Your glory and all the Brave Men said, Amen.