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TO BE UNGRATEFUL IS TO SQUANDER GOD'S GRACE

Today's Text: Ezekiel Chap. 16

Extracts:

Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ... "Cause Jerusalem to know her abominations, and say (to her) ... 'On the day you were born your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed in water to cleanse you;... but you were thrown into the open field, when you yourself were loathed on the day you were born.... Then I washed you in water; yes, I thoroughly washed off your blood, and I anointed you with oil. .. But you trusted in your own beauty, played the harlot because of your fame... Because you did not remember the days of your youth, but agitated Me with all these things, surely I will recompense your deeds on your own head. '"

[Ezek. 16: 1, 2, 4, 5, 9, 15, 43]

A well-known Nigerian politician and statesman in the 1960's was reported to have had disagreements with his strong-willed father over the need for the then young man to appreciate the sacrifices his parents had made to bring him to the point of national prominence. During one of the politician's frequent visits to his constituency, he had a major quarrel with his father. In an apparent fit of anger, his father ordered him to leave his house. The politician turned to his father and replied, "No! I am in my father's house. You go to your father's house!"

How do you explain the point of contention between father and son on the matter of gratitude? To the father, his son was not showing enough gratitude for his parents' contribution to his upbringing and success. On the other hand, the son's position suggests that whatever his parents had done for him was their responsibility for bringing him into the world.

Whatever position we may take on the matter, gratitude or the absence of it is an important subject. The majority of us are very grateful people and will not hesitate to show it to God or their human benefactors. However, there are also people who do not have the word, "gratitude," in their dictionaries. Are they just careless or downright ungrateful? Why is gratitude necessary or desirable? Does ingratitude carry any price?

In today's study, we shall use the conduct of the children of Israel towards God during the days of Ezekiel to examine ingratitude and how to overcome it.

1. How the children of Israel showed ingratitude to God

In today's bible verses [**Ezek. Chap. 16**], God passed a message to the children of Israel through the prophet Ezekiel. We can summarise His message as follows:

- The children of Israel seemed to have forgotten how far they had come from obscurity to prominence by God's grace. Their ancestors descended from the Amorites and Hittites. When they were born, their umbilical cords were not cut (figuratively speaking), nor were they washed or wrapped in swaddling cloths. They were loathed and thrown into the open field. Then, when God passed by and saw them struggling in their blood, He said, "Live!" He made them "thrive like a plant in the field," and they "grew, matured and became beautiful" [vv. 1-7]. As a result, they had "succeeded to royalty" and their fame had gone out among the nations [vv. 13, 14].
- But what had they done with the blessings that God had bestowed on them? Instead of using them to glorify Him, they "trusted in (their) own beauty, played the harlot because of (their) fame, and poured out (their) harlotry on everyone passing by who would have it" [v. 15]. In all their abominations, they "did not remember the days of (their) youth, when (they) were naked and bare, struggling in (their) blood" [v. 22].
- For their ingratitude, exhibited as sin and disobedience, God would return them to their nakedness and "recompense (their) deeds on (their) heads" [v. 43].

We infer from the forgoing story that the children of Israel had rewarded God's goodness towards them with evil and bitten the finger that had fed them. In other words, they were ungrateful to God by repaying His mercy with rebellion and sin. Are we any different in the way we relate today to God and our neighbours?

2. It is quite easy to be ungrateful!

The common response that *benefactors* use when people thank them for favours is "don't mention." What does that mean? Are they saying, "don't thank me," or "it is not necessary," or "that's enough"? Knowing how most people feel about ungrateful people, I doubt if they do not want to be thanked. Yet, the way some *beneficiaries* behave, you almost get the impression that they take "don't mention" quite literally. They just receive and scam like a stray dog with a stolen piece of bone! So, it is quite easy to be ungrateful without realizing it.

Here are a few of the ways we show ingratitude

- a) *When we fail to say, 'Thank You'*

The commonest form of ingratitude is when we fail to thank those who have done us favours. We receive and use the value of the favour but refuse or “forget” to thank our benefactors. It may not matter that we may have told those around us but without telling our benefactors, we have not thanked them.

Take the case of ten lepers who had come to Jesus to beg for healing [**Lk 17: 12-17**]. Under the law of Moses, lepers were treated as social outcasts who were isolated until pronounced healed and ritually clean by the priests [**Lev. 12: 1-46**]. Jesus showed them mercy and asked them to go and show themselves to the priests. As they went, they became healed. One of them, the only foreigner among them, a Samaritan, returned, glorifying God. He fell on his face at the feet of Jesus, “giving Him thanks.” Jesus was deeply touched by his gratitude and He said, “Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who *returned to give glory to God* except this foreigner?” [**Lk 12: 16-18**].

In deed, how many believers have the spirit of thanksgiving to fellow human beings, not to talk of God? Yet, we are required to give thanks in everything because that is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning us [**1 Thes. 5: 18**]. The point is well made through the Psalmist when God said, “If I were hungry, I would not tell you; for the world is Mine, and all its fullness... Offer to God *thanksgiving*, and pay your vows to the Most High. Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me” [**Ps. 50: 12, 14, 15**]. So, when we refuse to thank those who offer us favours, we make it more difficult to go back to them next time we are in need. Realising that we cannot avoid God, you can imagine how many of us squander our chances by refusing to thank Him.

b) *When we reward good with evil*

Some people benefit from the generosity and mentoring of others but as soon as they are in a position to reciprocate, they renege. For example, some children neglect their aging/ailing parents after benefitting from their sweat and tears. Some aspirants to leadership positions in the church, office, business or government soon turn around to bite the fingers that fed them after taking over. Some people use others as the ladder to climb to success only to throw them away as soon as they reach the top. All such actions are forms of ingratitude.

The word of God says, “Whoever rewards evil for good, evil will not depart from his house” [**Prov. 17: 13**]. Take the case of Nabal, Abigail’s husband that David and his men had helped to protect his flocks from attackers during David’s sojourn in the wilderness while running away from King Saul’s persecution. When David heard that Nabal was shearing his sheep, he sent his servants to him to request for provisions for himself

and his men. Nabal replied sarcastically, “Who is David, and who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants nowadays who break away each one from his master” [1 Sam. 25: 1-10]. Can you imagine a subject saying that of the next king of his country? When David was told what Nabal had said, he became angry and set out to destroy his estate. Nabal’s wise wife, Abigail, ran ahead with supplies to placate David and he relented. On her return, she briefed her husband of the danger that he had invited to his family with his ingratitude to David. Nabal collapsed and did not quite recover from it. God had struck him and he died ten days later. David later married Abigail [vv. 11-39]. Nabal had squandered God’s grace by rewarding good with evil.

That tells us how short-sighted ungrateful people can be! See what we do to God who makes the sun to shine on both the good and the bad and the rain to fall on the just and the unjust [Matt. 5: 45]. At every turn, we reward Him with sin and disobedience!

c) *When we fail to help the needy*

We have no control over the colour of our skin or race, gender or place/family of birth. We grew up and found ourselves where and who we are. In like manner, some people have found themselves disadvantaged but not of their own making [Jn. 9: 1-3]. In the words of Jesus, there will always be the poor among us [Jn 12: 8]. The winners in the race of life are hardly the fastest or the hardest working or the most skillful, but those who are enjoying God’s grace [Eccl. 9: 11]. Therefore, when God blesses us with material resources or talents, they are for His purposes [Deut. 8: 17-19]. That is why whatever good we do for the poor is a lending to the Lord and He has promised to repay [Prov. 19: 17].

Unfortunately, some successful people resent the needy. For example, in the Parable of the rich man and Lazarus [Lk 16: 19- 31], the rich man would rather set his dogs to lick the poor man’s sores than let him eat the crumbs from his table. When both of them died, Lazarus went to Paradise while the rich man went to hell. Many of us give to charity not because we love the poor or pay tithes because we fear God. We do so largely for tax benefits! Yet, if and when we are blessed by God but do not meet the needs of the needy, we are ungrateful to Him. He gives such sinners “the work of gathering and collecting, that he may give to him who is good before God” [Eccl. 2: 26].

d) *When we use our privileged positions to hurt the underdog*

When some people find themselves in privileged positions, they behave on the basis of *power* (physical control over resources) instead of *authority* (power limited by laws, rules or regulations). Since power corrupts, some

privileged people use it against the underdogs, especially those who insist on doing things legally and/or morally.

For example, by virtue of being the king of Israel, David had married the wife of one of his soldiers, Uriah, after getting him killed in battle. As the king, he had the power to do and undo. But he had exceeded his moral authority and hurt a defenceless man. That was why when God sent the prophet Nathan to David to point out his sin, God said, “I gave you your master’s house ... and the house of Israel and Judah. And if that had been too little, I also would have given you much more. Why have you despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight?” [2 Sam. 12: 7-9]. Is that not a show of ingratitude? For that, God told David that the sword would never depart from his house. Subsequently, incest, adultery and rebellion featured prominently in David’s family.

Clearly, we are more ungrateful to God and fellow human beings than we may admit. Can we afford to continue that way? God forbid!

3. Conclusion: Deal with ingratitude before it deals with you!

In summary, ingratitude to God amounts to using His blessings to serve Satan (idolatry) or to do wickedness (sin) or to refuse to thank Him for His mercies that endure forever [Ps. 118: 1]. Ingratitude to human beings is to fail to thank them or to reward them evil for good or to use our positions to hurt others or benefit only ourselves. On the day that Jesus will return to judge the world, His benchmarks will be based on our relationships with our neighbours- the hungry and the thirsty, the naked and the stranger, the sick and the prisoner. So, *whatsoever* we do to the least of His brethren, we do personally unto Him [Matt. 25: 34-40]. Ingratitude will put us at risk now and hereafter. Those who are ungrateful to their benefactors are not likely to forgive those who offend them. Without wrapping our prayers and supplications with thanksgiving, we cannot make our requests known to God [Phil. 4: 6]. Therefore, you need to deal with the problem before it deals with you!

If you have an ingratitude problem (like the rest of us!), the following suggestions will be helpful:

- Recognise the problem

You need to audit your gratitude profile, especially if you live in a society where they take ingratitude for granted. Do you realize that you hardly ever thank God or people when they do you a favour? Many people went to bed last night and did not wake up this morning. Do you know how much God protects you each new day from the wiles of Satan? What of the grace of His patience with you, to give you time to repent and be saved? Don’t you think you owe God gratitude for all that? You

remember that breakfast that your spouse or child or sibling prepared for you this morning while you were rushing to get ready for work. Don't you think you owe them some thanks? How about that cup of coffee by your secretary, that lunch paid for by your colleague, that gift from a visiting friend or that surprise birthday party hosted by a close relative? Do you consider all such favours your right or a mere privilege? Think on those things.

- Form an attitude of gratitude

What it may take to be grateful is to form the habit! Be conscious of the need to thank God for everything. Be grateful for the blessings you receive each new day- physical, psychological and spiritual. Use such blessings to benefit others that God brings across your path. Eschew evil in all your doings because your fruits may bring more people to Christ than your sermons. Realize that who or what you are today is only by God's grace, not your effort. Appreciate that God has a purpose for every blessing He grants you. Thank Him for making you worthy for His purposes. Thank those around you that He uses to bless you.

God first gave to you. While you were yet a sinner, He gave His only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to die for your sins. On account of that grace, your salvation is assured. Satan's stranglehold over your earthly life has been destroyed. You have been assured life that you can now live more abundantly! Don't you think that you need to be grateful to God for all that? To do otherwise is to squander His grace. Can you afford that?

For further reading

Learn to say 'Thank You,' *Weekly Bible Study Series*, Vol. 2, No. 21: 19 August 2001, www.bibleresourcecentre.com