

Beauty of Gratitude

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[0 : 00] Well, gratitude is beautiful. And ingratitude is very ugly.! And when God saves us, He begins to make us beautiful.

! When we were once very ugly. Well, beauty, beautiful and ugly. What God does and what man is by nature, those things were put side by side in September 2016.

2009 in Springfield, Massachusetts, at the Basketball Hall of Fame. Two, well, a total of five men gave their induction speeches.

The first to go was David Robinson, and he gave his induction speech first. And Michael Jordan gave his induction speech last. And the contrast couldn't have been clearer.

David was humble, gentle. He loved on his wife. He loved on his sons. He thanked his coaches from high school all the way up to his very last NBA coach.

[1 : 13] He thanked the man who replaced him, Tim Duncan. And, but all throughout that, and most of all, he thanked God. And you can tell when someone is faking, when they're just bringing God in because that's what you're supposed to do.

But David Robinson, you could tell he really meant it. And in seven brief minutes, he said, thank you. He honored all the people that had helped him.

And most of all, he honored his God. And he was an honor to God. Jesus really did look better after that speech was over. And you can go and watch it on YouTube, and you'll see exactly what I'm saying.

But everything David Robinson was, Jordan, Michael Jordan wasn't. Robinson honored others. Jordan honored himself.

Robinson was brief. Jordan went way over the length that they gave him. David honored God. Jordan honored basketball. Robinson saw his legacy.

[2 : 20] You could tell he saw it in his children, in his sons. He proudly pointed out his youngest son, after he had pointed out his oldest son, but his youngest son, and he said with pride in his heart, he is a man after God's own heart.

And Jordan's legacy was all of his highlights, his aerial artistry. But all throughout it, Michael Jordan griped and nitpicked.

He slighted others, and he brought up old slights against him. And when it was done, people, even the most obvious and blatant worldly, said, wow, who would think that someone so blessed, so gifted, could be so small, and so petty, and so ugly?

Well, gratitude is beautiful. And gratitude is ugly, wherever you see it. Well, we were born ugly, and God makes us beautiful.

And those are my two main points tonight. We're born ugly. We're born ungrateful. And yet, through the gospel, God makes us beautifully thankful.

[3 : 34] He begins to. So turn with me in your Bibles to Romans chapter 1. Romans chapter 1. And we were born ungrateful.

That's our first point. We are born ugly. And no matter how blessed we are, no matter how gifted we are, that's how we remain.

That's how we stay. All of Michael Jordan's gifts never made him overflowing with thanksgiving. They only magnified what was in his heart.

And all we see in Michael Jordan is what is naturally in all of us. And all we see in his nitpicking and his boasting is really ourselves, writ large, put on the screen for everyone to see.

So ingratitude. It's our natural DNA. Look at Romans 1.21. This is a very common, you know this verse.

[4 : 36] And it's speaking about all of mankind. And Paul is putting them all in this basket. And he says, For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God, nor gave thanks to him.

Nor gave thanks to him. But what shows the evil of man's heart? Well, you see it in two places. You see it in their idolatry. And then you see it in their ingratitude. They don't give thanks to God. They do lots of things.

And maybe they thank a lot of people. But they never give thanks to God. Men have life and they don't thank God for that life. Men have gifts and graces. Families and friends. Brains and brawn. Sun and rain. All these good things. And yet they never trace them back to the giver.

[5 : 39] And say thank you. And he gives them all of these things. And what does he get in return? Just the crickets. Silence.

The nothing. There's no thank you. Remember that occasion when Jesus healed the ten lepers. What was the ratio that came back?

It was ten percent. And even that ten percent is a miracle. Because without God's grace, we all go. And we don't say thank you.

But really the opposite of gratitude is pride. It comes from this pride. The Apostle John in his first epistle, he x-rays the world.

He x-rays all of men's hearts. And he dials down and he looks at it. What is this world all about? What is at the bottom of worldliness?

[6 : 43] And it's not so many of the things that we would culturally put in it. It's not, you know, certain bad things. It's not like all the things that people used to say. But the Apostle John says it's boasting of what he has and does.

That's the very exact opposite of thanksgiving. Men by nature boast about what we have and boast about what we do.

So worldliness is not seen first outwardly. It's not seen by what you wear. It's not seen by movies or your habits or anything like that. Worldliness is first seen in the heart that says, look what I have. Look what I've done. We don't give thanks. And so we're all like some sort of third world country that parades our junky military down the capital city.

And we boast about what we have, even though we didn't make it and we can't maintain it. And yet, here we are. We boast in it. See what we've done. See what we have.

[7 : 49] And so by nature, we're all sort of like Michael Jordan, harboring all these old slights, remembering all the old attacks on our pride, boasting about what we have and what we've done, and never feeling thankful.

Well, the question is, is why? Because we're all recovering from this. We're all coming out of this. We're either in it because we're still lost, or we still have a ways to go. So what blights? What kills Thanksgiving?

Why doesn't that beautiful flower grow in our hearts more? I have a sad confession. I keep a Thanksgiving journal.

Like every day, I try to write things I'm thankful for in the morning as part of my devotions. And really, my goal is to have three things that I'm thankful for.

[8 : 57] That doesn't sound impressive at all, does it? But can I say sometimes I can't even think of one? And maybe you can look bad at me, but I want you to try it.

Why is that? Why doesn't that beautiful flower of Thanksgiving grow in our hearts? Well, I think there's two poisons that poison the soil of our hearts.

And the first is independence. Why should I thank God? I don't need him. Why should I thank him? I don't need him.

He hasn't done anything for me. I don't need God. That independent, forgetful spirit kills gratitude. Moses pled with the Israelites in Deuteronomy to remember.

To remember what the Lord had done. Because he knew that they were going to forget. That was the tendency. They're going to forget. So they needed to call to mind what God had done for them.

[10 : 05] And how helpless they were. And what he did for them. Remember what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt. And so did they escape by their own power? Did they escape in their own strength?

Did we save ourselves? Moses said, remember. Remember the way the Lord your God has led you. Did they find their own way?

Did they know which way to go? Do we know which way to go? Do we know how to lead ourselves? They needed God. Moses said, remember. Remember lest you say in your heart.

Lord, my power and the might of my hand has gotten me this wealth. When they came into the promised land. We just talked about that in the book of Joshua.

The Lord delivered the promised land to them. The Lord was with them and fought for them. But the tendency was going to be to think that they had done it. And Moses said, remember.

[11:07] And that it's not your power. It wasn't your might. And so tonight. We're trying to remember. The things that we couldn't do.

The things that we needed God for. So what kills gratitude? Well, forgetting how much you need God. That independence. It's this funny thing that happens when Paul talks about it.

When man doesn't worship and thank God, the first thing they start to do is they make idols. And one of the first things they make idols to look like is themselves. Made to look like mortal man.

What do I need? More of me. Someone like me. It's that independence that kills Thanksgiving. And so it's no wonder when they're thinking all about themselves and how they don't need God that they don't thank God.

What's the second poison? It's entitlement. Entitlement. Entitlement. I deserve this.

[12:11] I deserve it. We don't say thank you for our paychecks because we feel like we've put in the time. And we have. We've done the work.

And a worker deserves his wages. And so you go to the grocery store. Right? And you put a whole bunch of groceries in your cart. And you push it out. But you're not saying, Oh, thank you, Walmart. Thank you. You're so kind to give me these groceries. No, we paid for them. We feel entitled to them. And we feel entitled to a shorter line.

Right? We feel entitled. And maybe to some degree, I mean, that's why we don't say thank you at Kroger or whatever. But we have to remember that the things that God has given us, we have never paid him anything extra.

We've never done anything extra for him. But again, that's us. Jordan, Michael Jordan felt entitled to the Hall of Fame. He felt entitled to belittle all these people.

[13:19] Even at the moment when he was being honored. But that's the ugliness of man that says, I deserve this.

I deserve this. I deserve all the good things I have. And I don't deserve all the bad things I have. So my car, my clothes, my place in life, my family, I've deserved this all.

Even more than that, I deserve what you have, too. I deserve your things, too. And that's the ugliness of man. And so how ugly and how deformed.

I don't think we can read too much disgust into Paul's statement that they don't glorify God and they don't give thanks to him.

That is an appalling injustice. It's an ugly, audacious, nasty disease. And the ugliness of that disease is the black background, the black backdrop of what God is doing.

[14:35] Because God makes us beautiful. He puts gratitude in our hearts. Praise God, he makes us beautiful.

He cleans out that poison. And he starts to show us. That I need him. And I don't deserve him.

And that's what he does. And he does it by the gospel. You know, Moses said, remember, remember, remember. And they didn't remember. It wasn't in their hearts.

The great, great vast majority of them, they didn't remember. But in the gospel, he puts a new spirit in us. He sheds abroad the light and the love of God in our hearts.

And so we begin to see ourselves in a whole new light. And we begin to see him in a whole new light. And so we begin to say thank you. And we begin to do what we're going to do in a few moments.

[15:34] We're going to be offering up a beautiful, fragrant offering to the Lord. This offering of thanksgiving. And he is the one that planted that flower.

He does it by the gospel. So how does he do that? How does he plant that flower? Well, first he begins by showing us how much we need him. How much we've needed him.

We've always needed him. We've always needed him. From the first day until this day, we've needed him.

But we didn't know it, did we? We didn't see it. We didn't understand it. We didn't appreciate it. But then he opened up our eyes. And now we see, I need him.

Every hour I need thee. Every hour. And so tonight, we're going to say thank you because we've needed him day after day this year. We needed him to come close.

[16:33] We needed him to help us. We felt our need and we've turned to him in that need and he's helped us. And so we're going to say thank you. We felt our need for him to be near us.

We used to not think that we needed God's help. But now it's one of our greatest joys and comforts to know that here I am in this moment and God is with me.

I put the Lord at my right hand. There he is. Well, God shows us what we are.

Helpless, needy, weak, frail creatures. Not the creators, not the gods that we painted ourselves as, but what we are.

Frail creatures. And when God helps people like us, we should say thank you. We've needed him and he's helped us.

[17:36] But more than that, the gospel comes to us as undeserving. I just talked about how ugly an ungrateful heart is, how deformed, how unrighteous it is.

And the gospel comes to people like that who don't deserve it. I don't deserve anything. We didn't choose him.

He chose us. We didn't love him first. He loved us first. And when did he love us? When we were powerless, helpless, sinners, ungodly, when the stench of our sin and our ingratitude was doing anything and everything to turn him away.

That is when he moved in love toward us. That is when he came and loved on us. That's when he called us to Jesus and that's when he forgave us of our sins and that's when he washed us and made us new and we didn't deserve any of that.

We didn't deserve any of that. It's all grace. Mercy. Grace from the beginning. Grace to the end.

[18:59] And so every morning I wake up to him and I wake up to his love and I wake up to his faithfulness and that's grace. And every morning and our every night to lay your head on your pillow with his forgiveness,!

With his forgiveness, with his mercy. And we go to sleep with his watch care over us. Grace. He's filled our days with good things.

He's filled our days with good things. He's filled our days with his love and the love of others and blessings. Have we deserved any of it?

No. It's all grace. God's grace. Grace greater than all my sin and shame. Grace deeper than all of my needs. It's just mercy.

Grace in the morning and grace in the evening. And so, who am I that God would have mercy on me? Who am I? So we don't deserve the least of his blessings, but instead he's given us everything.

[20:11] That's what Paul says. Really, what's the sum of what God has given you? Everything. Everything is yours in Christ. All the apostles are yours.

Jesus is yours. God is yours. Everything is yours in Christ. And it's too much to take in. Because when you think about who we are and what we are and what we've done and what we deserve and then for God to totally turn everything on its head and give us everything in its place, it's too much for our hearts to take in.

It's too much for our hearts to absorb. And so, you know what we're going to be doing for centuries and centuries and ages and ages in heaven, we're going to be saying thank you.

Thank you. But now, what does that kind of love deserve? well, we sing it, love so amazing, so divine.

Love so amazing, so divine. That's God-like love. What kind of, what does that deserve? Well, it demands my life, my soul, my all. my all.

[21:25] My all. And so, what can we do? What does God deserve from us? Everything we can give him. But, you know, everything we can give him, it begins with some place like here and some time like now when we say thank you.

When we begin by opening our mouths and saying thank you to him for all of his goodness to us. So that's what we're going to do tonight. We haven't deserved it.

We haven't earned it. We're not entitled to it. And yet, he has blessed us in so many ways. And so, we can begin by saying thank you tonight.