

To me the most amazing... but little-known fact about Thanksgiving... is one that I just became aware of a few days ago. ... It is this: The pilgrims made seven times more graves to bury their dead... than huts for them to live in... nevertheless, these same pilgrims set aside a day of thanksgiving. ... (Think about it!) The pilgrims made seven times more graves than huts ... and even still... they set aside a day of thanksgiving.

Is that your pattern for thanksgiving...? Or is it more along the lines of the way many of us seem to be naturally wired... Once the good outweighs all the bad... **then** I can consider giving thanks...?

To be grateful for the good things that happen in our lives is easy... but to be grateful for **all** of our lives — the **good** as well as the **bad**... the moments of **joy**... as well as the moments of **sorrow**... the **successes**... as well as the **failures**... the **rewards** as well as the **rejections** - that requires **hard spiritual work**. ... But we are only truly grateful people... when we can say "thank you" to **all** that has brought us to the present moment. (These are the words of Catholic Theologian, Henri Nouwen.)

(He continues.) As long as we keep dividing our lives between events and people we would like to **remember**... and those we would rather **forget**... we cannot claim the fullness of our beings... as a gift of God to be grateful for. ... Let's not be afraid to look at everything that has brought us to where we are now... and trust that we will soon see in it... the guiding hand of a loving God.

I think Nouwen is absolutely right! I particularly resonate with his observation that being grateful for both the good and the bad that happens in our life takes hard spiritual work. ... Our natural self doesn't seem to be wired that way.

Fortunately the passage we come to this morning in our study through the Gospel of Luke helps us out with this. It will provide us with a key component... an understanding that we need... in order to become a truly grateful person. Our verses today teach us a lesson that seeks to do some much needed re-wiring in many of us who need it. And I confess that I am one of those who needs it.

Now... before we turn to the passage and get to the lesson... let me first give a few more examples that demonstrate how we should be wired... as well as assure you that this is the way God is willing to wire all of us. These examples... although incredible... can be the patterns that God would develop in of any of our lives...

The famous English Bible scholar... Matthew Henry... was once attacked by thieves and robbed of his purse. (Yes, in his day, men did carry purses.) ... But Matthew Henry wrote these words in his diary: "Let me be thankful. First, I was never robbed before. Second, although they took my purse, they didn't take my life. Third, although they took my all, it was not much. Fourth, let me be thankful because it was I who was robbed and not I who did the robbing."

... ..

August 9, 1995, marked the 50th anniversary of the bombing of Nagasaki, Japan. What you may not realize is that Nagasaki was the center of Japanese Christianity. A substantial Christian community had survived three centuries of persecution. They worshipped underground and endured martyrdom. They were only allowed to live their faith in public at the turn of the century. Then, in 60 seconds, they were wiped out.

But the survivors' response wasn't anger. Takashi Nagai, who lost his wife in the blast and who later died from the effects of radiation, said that the 8,000 Christians who died instantly in the blast had been specially chosen by God as an expiation from all sins committed during the war. Nagai said, "Let us give thanks that through this sacrifice, peace was given to the world and freedom of religion to Japan."

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Retired U.S. Marine Corps General Charles Krulak tells of the time when he as a nonbeliever was first confronted with the testimony of a person committed to Christ:

Thirty-five years ago I was a young second lieutenant just graduated from the Naval Academy, married 14 days after I graduated. My wife and I went down to Quantico, Virginia, home of the basic school where officers learn about honor, courage, and commitment. At that time in my life I thought I was a cross between John Wayne and Tom Cruise. Because I was married, I shared a room with another married officer named John Listerman. John was a wonderful human. He exuded goodness. If I asked him for his arm, he would have said, "Where do you want me to cut it off?"

At the wrist? The elbow?" John was a Christian. That meant nothing to me other than *Gee, what a nice guy. I guess this Christian stuff must be pretty good.*

Upon graduating from basic school, John and I went to Camp Pendleton, California, where we joined the same battalion preparing to go to Vietnam. And I saw another side of John Listerman: he was a tremendous leader—aggressive and technically proficient. People loved him. He was committed to his troops; his troops were committed to him. He was a Marine's Marine.

On a December morning in 1965 John and I went to war. John Listerman's war lasted one day.

We were on patrol moving down a trail through the jungle. We came around a corner in that trail, and we ran into an ambush. John took the first round, a 50-caliber round right in his kneecap. As his kneecap burst, the crack was so loud it sounded like a mortar exploding. It threw him up in the air. As he was dropping, the second round hit him right below the heart and exited out his side. I was wounded also but nowhere near as badly. I saw John about 30 meters away on his back, his leg blown off.

I crawled up to him, and I wanted to say, "Are you okay? Can I do anything?" but before I could do that, his head turned to me and he said, "How are you doing, Chucker? Are you okay?"

I said, "Yes, John. I'm okay." He said, "Are my men safe?" I said, "John, your people are okay." At that point he turned his head and looked to the sky and repeated over and over, "Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord. Thank you for caring for my people. Thank you for caring for me."

I was dumbfounded.

(John Listerman and Charles Krulak were evacuated. Krulak later became a Christian.)

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The pilgrims made seven times more graves than huts...nevertheless, [they] set aside a day of thanksgiving.

What makes people be so incredibly thankful...? ... What would make me a grateful person like these examples of thank-filled people...? ... I think that any believer who takes to heart the truths that emanate from our passage today... would find themselves well down the path of maturing into such a thanks-giving believer.

Let's turn to our passage now. I will first relate the story... then its principles... and then show how our belief in these truths can alter our ability to be thankful... instead of fear... doubt... and grumbling to others... when circumstances look bad for us.

### **Luke 13:31-33**

Some Pharisees came to Jesus with what **appeared** to be friendly advice... ("*Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you,*"). But this advice actually wasn't given to Jesus... because they wanted to protect Him. Theirs was a fake concern for His safety... And Jesus was not fooled. ... Jesus knew there was a collusion going on between His enemies.

King Herod had already been politically **damaged** because he had the very popular... John the Baptist... murdered... and he did not want another such blotch on his record. ... So... more than likely... what we see here is his ploy... involving these Pharisees... who Herod, himself, sent to pass along this threat to Jesus. It appears that he was hoping Jesus would be frightened into going south to Judea. ... And the Pharisees would have gone along with Herod's ploy... because if Jesus could be manipulated into traveling to Judea... Jesus would then fall to the powerful Sanhedrin.

Their wicked intentions were ultra-clear to Jesus... and we see Jesus reply to Herod... in a manner that He never responds to anyone else. Jesus shows utter contempt for Herod in His reply. Herod is the only individual whom Jesus is recorded as treating with contempt. ... And not just here. But later... when Jesus stood before Herod as He was being tried for crucifixion... Jesus said nothing to him at all... which again... was showing contempt for him. As Leon Morris has remarked, "When Jesus has nothing to say to a man... that man's position is hopeless." Herod was a dead man in every way.

### **Luke 13:32**

"Fox" was common jargon in Hebrew for a person with base cunning. It was also used to designate someone as "insignificant" and absolutely "worthless". It was an expression of utter contempt.

Jesus' disdain further showed itself in another part of His answer: "I will cast out demons and perform cures [i.e., *I will continue to do my normal*

*ministry*] today and tomorrow... and on the third day I will finish my course [i.e., I will carry on my ministry for a short time and then I will be finished]."

To Herod this meant that Jesus would do what he set out to do at his own pace and his own schedule until He was finished... despite Herod's attempts at manipulation. But in the wider context of Luke, this was a cryptic reference to Jesus' death and resurrection being under **divine** control.

King Jesus had addressed Herod... the petty monarch... with regal contempt and kingly confidence. This was... of course on purpose. This wasn't an emotional response that came blurring out from His lips. It was sovereign premeditation! ... Jesus similarly spoke about divine control and His appointed time to die on one other occasion...

**John 10:18 (ESV)**

No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."

Having aggressively answered Herod... Jesus' matching answer... this time to the Pharisees... was even **sharper**. Verse 33...

**Luke 13:33**

Jesus says... "**I must go**..." ... He was committed to finish the course... His way... in His Own timing. Then He adds, "*it cannot be*"... Not even Herod's plans... with the full force of the Roman Empire standing behind it... could interfere with God's plan.

But what did Jesus mean when he said: *“for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem”*...? It could not mean that no prophet had ever died outside that city’s borders... because some **had**.

I think Jesus is using a little sarcasm. ... Jerusalem – the center of Jewish religion and worship was actually a dangerous place for God’s prophets... because several **had** died there... They were murdered by the religious leaders. Jesus said in essence, "Jerusalem has the monopoly on killing the prophets... and on this highest occasion the city will not be deprived."

Jesus chose to go to Jerusalem... where He knew He was the Lamb who was to be sacrificed there. ... He was like an all-knowing Isaac who carried the wood of sacrifice for his father, Abraham, and the knife on his back as he dutifully climbed the mountain knowing where and who was the offering. This was God’s plan and it would only happen the way God had it planned.

Jesus had answered Herod and the proud Pharisees with royal disdain and irony. And the mention of His death in Jerusalem turned His thoughts to God’s people, represented by Jerusalem. So He breaks forth in lament over them.

### **Luke 13:34**

Jesus expressed His desire for His people with a magnificent image... that of a mother bird brooding over her young in the nest. Tucked under God’s wings... one finds protection and security. This is not a sentimental image. This is what Jesus longs to do for **us**. He wants to give us warmth and security. It is a metaphor - divinely chosen - to convey God's longing in Christ for His people. This metaphor poignantly expressed Jesus' heart cry



for his people. ... But... .. they were "not willing"! ... They were responsible for their aloneness and ultimate lostness. ... This is also true of us... if we do not choose to be under the security of His wings.

*"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often I would have gathered your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it!"* ... Jerusalem symbolized the heart of the Jewish people. ... It was here that the beautiful temple stood... and where God was supposed to reside within the Holy of Holies. ... To the center of this religious community... God sent many prophets to warn the people of their wicked ways... and in each case the people managed to kill the prophets. ... And because Jerusalem was coming under the wrath of God... by the hands of the Roman General Titus in 70 AD... our Lord said He had been sent like a mother hen to spread her wings and protect all the chicks from harm and danger. ... But when He came to warn them of their sin... and the coming wrath of God... they rejected Him as their Messiah and... rather than gather under His wings... instead... they sought to find a way to have Him killed.

As sinful and rebellious as they were... Jesus' heart still ached for them to repent and follow God's ways... instead of their own selfish ways.

### **Luke 13:35a**

Jerusalem, the center of the nation... was destroyed by the Romans in 70A.D. Historical descriptions of what happened are absolutely horrific. One cannot imagine the terrible scene that Christ knew was coming to

them. The city was starved into submission before its desolation. ... According to the 1<sup>st</sup> century Roman Historian, Josephus... the roofs were crammed with famished women with babies in their arms... and the alleys were filled with corpses of the elderly. ... Children and young people swollen from starvation "*roamed like phantoms through the market-places and collapsed wherever their doom overtook them.*" ... But there was no lamenting or wailing... because famine had strangled their emotions. ... Jerusalem could not bury all the bodies... so they were flung over the wall. ... The silence was broken only by the laughter of robbers stripping the bodies.

But Jesus did not stop with this devastating scene of complete destruction... God's verdict on Jerusalem... Such judgment was not the final word. Jesus directed attention to look farther into... what is still future to you and I...

### **Luke 13:35b**

This quotation from Psalm 118:26 was properly quoted as they celebrated Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem... when He came there to die... but there will be another time... that it will be shouted again... in response to Christ at His second coming. I see this as a prediction... that when Christ returns... there will be **many** in Israel... who will finally understand the words of many relevant Scriptures... and will be trusting in Jesus as their Messiah at that time.

History... current events... and whatever tomorrow holds... will all serve to advance all that God has planned... and nothing will stop it. It will happen... just as God has designed...

Now... how does all of this help us to be like the grateful people that I used as illustrations as we began this morning...?

When dense clouds darken your sky... when a violent wind begins to blow... when a gloomy mist covers your eyes... and thunder strikes your ears... and all of your senses have been numbed with fright... when everything seems to you to be confused and mixed up... when you have lost your significant source of income... and your debt continues to rise through the roof... when your health has restricted your freedoms... making the simplest of tasks now require careful planning... when relationships that you once counted on have been taken away... .. There still remains... this whole time... a constant quiet and serenity where God exists...

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While these disturbances in the world crash all around you and deprive you of good judgment... God out of the pure light of His justice and wisdom... moderates and directs these very moments... just the way He wants them... in the best- conceived order and to the perfect outcome! . .

The Pharisees who came to Jesus in our passage today tried to knock Jesus off course. They tried to strike thunderous fear at Him. But He couldn't be moved because He knew God would have His Own way completely. God had a plan and a threat with the power of Rome behind it could not shake Jesus or His confidence.

A believer's constant outlook of gratitude... is sourced upon the knowledge of God being unshaken and in full control. Anticipation for the inevitable... favorable... outcome follows upon this knowledge. . .

Our ignoring God's complete sovereignty and control over each and every single event in our life... is the ultimate origin of all miseries in the believer's life. Whenever we ignore... or forget... or are simply ignorant of God's full sovereignty...(which is His directing us to the best-conceived order and best outcome)... misery is inevitable. ... On the other hand... the highest blessings and greatest amount of gratitude are deeply rooted in the knowledge of God's sovereign providence.

**Romans 8:28 (ESV)**

*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*

As we heard the words of Henri Nouwen at the beginning today... . "Let's not be afraid to look at everything that has brought us to where we are now and trust that we will soon see in it the guiding hand of a loving God."

Full gratitude can arise from knowing God has an unshakable plan that I am part of. God has an ultimate plan that He is sovereignly working in our lives... and even what looks like earth shattering devastation to you and I... fits perfectly into that plan. ... Second... gratitude can arise from knowing how He treats His chosen ones.

Jesus looked at God's chosen people – Israel. He looked at their near future in light of their rebellion... and lamented for them... . Any who are called according to his purpose... are chosen. ... Jesus sees all of the

ugliness and mess that we make out of our rebellious lives... and yet He still yearns to take us... under His wing... offering safety... warmth... and protection. Christ cries for us at the mess that our rebellion sometimes brings. He yearns for us when we go astray. Christian... you are a chosen one of His. You have been called according to His purpose.

You have to celebrate your chosenness constantly. ...This means saying "thank you" ... to God for having chosen you... and "thank you" ... to all who remind you of your chosenness. ... Gratitude is the most fruitful way of deepening your consciousness that you are not an "accident" ... but a divine choice.

You are chosen if you believe in Christ. But let me explain what the Bible means "to believe in Christ." It is not simply believing certain facts about Christ... such as, Jesus was a literal figure of human history who lived a little over 2,000 years ago... He was crucified on a cross and He rose from the dead... A person who is a believer is one who primarily **follows** Jesus Christ. Now... in order to be a follower it **is** necessary to believe certain facts about Him... but that is not the extent of it. A believer is someone who walks in relationship with Christ.

Recently Western Seminary launched a new blog site. Professors... the school's theologians... all take turns anonymously writing articles on it every day. This is what one of the professors wrote in yesterday's blog:

Biblical belief means that you no longer believe or trust in yourself but rather have moved that trust out of yourself and "into" Jesus. Biblical belief is leaving self-sufficiency behind and embracing Christ-sufficiency. Biblical belief is throwing yourself into the merciful arms of

Jesus, believing that he will catch you. Biblical belief is trusting him for everything: forgiveness, salvation, life.

To state it more theologically, biblical belief is believing that Jesus is who says he is, and that he will do what he said he will do. It is to believe that he does for you what you could not do for yourself. What did he do? He provided the means by which our sins could be forgiven and we could be brought into fellowship with God. God's love and Jesus' death built the gate at the cross so that by faith the door could swing open and we could walk through.

But the Bible doesn't just say "believe in," it says "believe into." The New Testament was originally written in the Greek language, and one of the frustrating parts in being a translator is that certain things simply cannot be restated in English. This is one of those passages.

John wants to make a point, and to do so he breaks Greek grammar. And he doesn't just kind of break grammar; he makes a horrible "blunder" that is so bad we have no record of anyone else in all Greek literature making the same blunder. Of course, he is doing it intentionally to make a point. John doesn't say we should respond by "believing in" but rather "believe into." It is the "into" with the verb "believe" that is such bad Greek grammar.

Have you placed such trust in Jesus Christ...? Is God calling you to place such trust in Him today...? Come... and allow Him to turn your heart into one that can be full of thanks – even when times are rough.

Some of you have already placed your trust in Christ... and God is calling you to be more thankful. ... Perhaps there are circumstances in your life

that you are contending with right now... in which you need to acknowledge that God is in full control. ... The heavens aren't shaking... they are as calm as when these Pharisees thought that they could frighten Jesus with news about Herod trying to kill Him. ... God is in control. Thank Him for that... and then thank Him because He yearns for your welfare.