

9.24.06

Overflowing With Gratitude 1 Chronicles 29:1-18

Douglas Scalise, Brewster Baptist Church

I'd like to share with you a little about my week. Last Sunday afternoon I enjoyed having a couple of hours talking with people interested in learning more about our church and perhaps joining as members. It is always fun to be with folks who are newer to the church and excited to be here.

On Monday night Missionary Madeline Flores Lopes, Pastor Irma Gomez from Puerto Rico, and Pastor Jacqueline Ballista from the Dominican Republic came over to our home for dinner. We had a great time, laughing, and telling stories. We also learned more about the challenges, hopes, and needs these terrific women have in their different ministries. Financially the pressure on people like Madeline has grown tremendously as she now has to raise half of her salary from churches like ours who believe in what she is doing. Before they left we stood in a circle in our living room, holding hands while Irma prayed for all of us in Spanish, giving thanks and praise to God for all the blessings we have, the oneness we have in Christ, it was very special. I am so grateful for sisters in Christ like our friends who are serving faithfully and joyfully in situations much more difficult and challenging than ours on Cape Cod.

Tuesday morning I exercised my right to vote by filling out a ballot, and I gave thanks that on the same day there was a military coup in Thailand, I could vote freely and without fear. Tuesday evening Mary and Fred Downs hosted our guests and others who have gone on BBC mission trips and that was so nice. Seeing just a few of the people whose lives have been changed by their choosing to give up time and money to go work hard to help people in Puerto Rico, the DR, Mississippi, and so many other places made me feel very grateful to be a part of BBC and to have experienced many of those trips myself.

On Wednesday I was up in Newton attending the Annual Meeting of the Massachusetts Baptist Charitable Society for which I am a Trustee. We had a chance to hear from two pastors who had received grants to help fund sabbaticals. The Society helps current pastors repay educational loans, and assist with paying for non reimbursed medical bills to aid retired pastors and their spouses who need a little financial help. I am grateful for the generosity of people through the years that enables the Charitable Society to give so freely and happily to help those who are serving the Lord, and God's people. Talking in depth with several younger pastors about their ministries and some of

what they are doing and giving them encouragement was gratifying and also made me realize I am starting to get older.

After the meeting I drove to my parent's home in Brookline and went out to dinner with them at one of our favorite restaurants. Then my dad and I went to the Red Sox game and watched David Ortiz tie a 68 year old team record for home runs. As my parents get older I treasure these times with them and I am keenly aware of how thankful I am to have been raised by them and to have had them in my life for so long. When my mother was my age, she had already lost both her parents.

Thursday morning I took the trolley into Boston and walked to a little restaurant where I had breakfast and deep conversation with my college roommate Greg Cronin who is the men's hockey coach at Northeastern University. Greg and I have known each other for 24 years and our friendship is such that we can talk about anything and everything and the time flew by.

That evening I was up in Andover, north of Boston, at Vision New England's Annual Ministry Celebration. I chatted with pastors and lay leaders I know from around the region and listened to the VNE's new strategic emphasis on Intentional Evangelism, and then heard Tim Keller, an excellent pastor in New York City talk about the serious challenges facing churches. As I drove home late Thursday night I was grateful that regardless of what some folks say is the terrible condition of the church in New England, that BBC is an exception to the rule.

After being away from home for two days, I enjoyed seeing my family Friday morning, getting the boys off to school, and then going for a long walk on the beach with Jill, getting caught up, watching all the birds, picking up some sea glass, and shells. Later after moving furniture out of Jo Ann Ritter's mom's house thanks to the help of Ben Gregson, Jill and I picked up the boys and went to the Nauset soccer game with where we sat with Michael and Sarah Kemp and Steve and Gail Chapman and watched Ryan Kemp dominate the game and score a hat trick on the beautiful last day of summer.

Washing the dishes after dinner on Friday night, I kept putting dirty dishes in the sink so they got filled with water as I was rinsing off dishes I'd cleaned so that they'd be easier to wash. Looking down at a pot, I watched how, once it was full, water just spilled over the side. There was always more water coming than the pot could hold. I kept emptying the pot, and putting it back and watching how it kept on filling and it struck me **that gratitude is just like that for all of us.** God gives us more than we can receive

and the way we make room for more is by giving thanks, offering praise, and sharing the love, concern, time, and resources God has temporarily entrusted to us.

These events were not the only ones of my week; there were others that were less pleasant, more stressful, aggravating and disappointing. Perhaps your past week was similar to mine, different circumstances but still a mix of good and bad, joyful moments and times of sadness, pleasant hours and stressful situations. I believe when we choose to look at, focus on, and be grateful for the many good things in our life, rather than the bad or the depressing we will find so many reasons for giving thanks and praise to God that we will be overflowing with gratitude, like a pot that can't contain all the water flowing into it.

On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being *“overflowing with gratitude”* and 1 being *“I feel like I have nothing for which to be grateful,”* how are you feeling this morning? Today's passage from 1 Chronicles 29 features the words of David who is at “10” on the overflowing with gratitude scale.

This passage is David's praise to God for who God is and all God has done and includes his providing from his resources for the building of the Lord's temple. It is an expression of worship, praise, and gratitude.

“Then David blessed the Lord in the presence of all the assembly; David said: “Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of our ancestor Israel, forever and ever. **Yours, O Lord**, are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and on the earth **is yours; yours is** the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all. Riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might; and it is in your hand to make great and to give strength to all. And now, our God, we give thanks to you and praise your glorious name. “But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to make this freewill offering? For **all things come from you**, and of your own have we given you. For we are aliens and transients before you, as were all our ancestors; our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope. O Lord our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a house for your holy name comes from your hand and is **all your own**. I know, my God, **that you search the heart, and take pleasure in uprightness**; in the uprightness of my heart **I have freely offered all these things**, and now I have seen your people, who are present here, **offering freely and joyously to you**. O Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our ancestors, keep forever such purposes and thoughts in the hearts of your people, and direct their hearts toward you.”

David's life, like ours, has been a mix of good and bad. He has been in countless battles, risked his life many times, he's known the heights of success and power, and the depths of deep personal sin that has had serious consequences for himself and for other people. David, like us, has to choose where his focus will be on the fragile, short nature of life as he says, "our days on earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope." Or on the greatness, glory, and generosity of God who gives us the gift of life and so much else as well. David wants to insure that a temple is built and so he gives freely, joyfully, and sacrificially and encourages others to do the same. The temple is a tangible place for God's presence to dwell in the midst of the people. As we shall see next month, once the people are used to worshipping God in a central place, the temple in Jerusalem, they will face a crisis of faith when Jerusalem is conquered and the temple, the place of God's dwelling is destroyed. As exiles, the people have to cope with the question of who are we as the people of God with no temple in which to worship. As Psalm 137 says, "How are we to sing the Lord's songs in a foreign land?"

A second temple was built when the exiles were allowed to return and it was functioning hundreds of years later when Jesus was preaching and teaching. Jesus told those who would listen that in him (Matthew 12:6), "something greater than the temple is here." In Jesus, God was present in the midst of the people in a far greater and more personal way than in the temple. Jesus said that the temple would be destroyed, which it was in 70 AD by the Romans. He also said referring to his own body (John 2:19-22), "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." When Jesus was dying on the cross and breathed his last, Matthew says (27:51), "At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom." This was the curtain that separated the priest from what was called the Holy of Holies, the very place of God's presence. The curtain being torn in two symbolizes the fact that Jesus, tortured to death on a cross from which he responded by forgiving not condemning his enemies, is the picture of what God is like.

In 1 Corinthians Paul tells both the congregation as a whole and each individual believer you are temple of Holy Spirit. To the church he says (3:16-17), "*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.*" To each believer he writes (6:19-20),

“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.”

As Christians we are overflowing with gratitude every single day because we were bought at the priceless cost of the life of Christ. Our body is now a contact point between the kingdom of God and the world, individually and as a congregation we are temples. We bring God's presence wherever we go, it is not limited to this building, or just one physical location.

What a difference it makes when we live our lives out of gratitude, sharing our thankfulness, praise, and joy with the world, bringing others in touch with the wonder of God's love for us in Christ. A group of students was studying the "Seven Wonders of the Modern World." At the end of the lesson, the students were asked to list what they considered to be the seven wonders, they came up with the 1. Suez Canal, 2. Dneproges (a hydroelectric station, central Ukraine USSR), 3. Atomic Energy Research Establishment, Harwell, England, 4. Alaska (ALCAN) Highway, 5. Golden Gate Bridge, 6. Eiffel Tower and 7. Empire State Building.

While gathering the votes, the teacher noted that one student, a quiet girl, hadn't turned in her paper yet. She asked the girl if she was having trouble with her list.

The girl replied, *"Yes, a little. I couldn't quite make up my mind because there were so many!"* The teacher said, *"Well, tell us what you have, and maybe we can help."*

The girl hesitated, then read, "I think the 'Seven Wonders of the World' are:

1. To touch
2. To taste
3. To see
4. To hear."

She hesitated a little, "and then,

5. To run
6. To laugh
7. To love."

It is easy for us to look at the exploits of human beings and refer to them as "wonders" while we overlook all God has done, regarding those things as merely "ordinary." We

need to be reminded each day that all around us there are miracles and signs and wonders.

David was overflowing with gratitude because he chose the right attitude toward God and toward all his wealth. His gift toward building the temple in modern dollars would have been huge and he gave it freely and joyfully. One pastor describes the importance of sharing David's belief that everything we have is God's. *"When you and I acknowledge that God is the owner, then there is peace and enjoyment in life. If we think it belongs to us, then we spend much of our life rationalizing, arguing, hoarding and trying to hold on to what we think is ours. Life is not enjoyed; instead life becomes chaotic."* Gary Langness.

St. Augustine wrote, *"God gives where He finds empty hands. A man whose hands are full of parcels can't receive a gift."* Next week we are going to receive the World Mission Offering which supports the work of people like Madeline Flores-Lopes, Bill and Ann Clemmer, and the Oprenov family from Bulgaria who will be here at BBC on Tuesday evening at 7:00 pm. I hope we can give freely and joyfully for our missionaries who are helping to bring the temple of the Lord's presence to people all around the world.

This week Shirley Vogel shared an email with me that about Rick and Kay Warren. Rick Warren wrote, "When I get up in the morning, I sit on the side of my bed and say, God, if I don't get anything else done today, I want to know You more and love You better. God didn't put me on earth just to fulfill a to-do list. He's more interested in what I am than what I do. That's why we're called human beings, not human doings. In Happy moments, PRAISE GOD.
In Difficult moments, SEEK GOD.
In Quiet moments, WORSHIP GOD.
In Painful moments, TRUST GOD.
In Every moment, THANK GOD."

That is what it's like to be overflowing with gratitude.

Offering

In Scotland, a pastor in a small church where the collection plate was rarely full was taking the offering. When the plate came back to the pastor to pray over the offering, he saw that the few pennies in it were even less than usual.

He held the plate up in front of him and said, "*Well Lord, we thank you for the safe return of the plate.*"

Blessing: Now "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name in of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

Take the presence of the Lord with you into the world. Amen. Colossian 3:16-17