

VOC-September 2014: Living in Thankfulness

4. A life of thankfulness: what is your *strength*?

Dear Listeners,

In the messages we gave during this month, we focussed on a life of *thankfulness*. We learned *why* we ought to show thankfulness for the great work of salvation the Lord Jesus performed in order to satisfy the justice and truth of God concerning our sin and guilt and death and slavery to Satan. He saved us from the wrath of God and condemnation! He did so in order that we could be *restored* to God, be *renewed* in His image by His Holy Spirit, and live again in *communion* with God. We also learned that the *Lord Jesus Christ* does this work of renewal as part and parcel of His deliverance and redemptive work. He does so *by His Spirit and Word*, renewing our heart and mind and soul and strength, so that with our whole life we show ourselves thankful to God. *How?* By living in accordance with His will, to please Him in a life of *obedience to His law*! The Holy Spirit writes this law on our hearts, and He works the *desire* to fight against sin and evil in our lives and to *delight* in Him, delight in living for Him!

Then we have seen already, dear listeners, that this new life still leaves a lot to be desired. In this life even the *holiest* have only a small beginning of this new obedience. It's *that awareness*, which drives us out to God in *prayer*. In our prayers we express our *joy* in God who restores us in Christ to a new life. By prayer we also *seek* God's *power* to live in a way that's pleasing to Him. That's why prayer is so important for us; yes, it's the *most important way* of showing our thankfulness! Prayer shows that we're redeemed and restored to God. Prayer helps to glorify God for His grace and Holy Spirit. God is pleased when we express our thankfulness and our needs to Him in prayer! In OT terms, it's like a *sacrifice of thankfulness*, an offering of incense to the LORD. From the OT and NT we learn that our prayers must be like a pleasing sacrifice before the LORD! They must be *in accordance to God's will* for them to be *pleasing*. Thankfully, the Lord Jesus *also* led us in *this* aspect of our restored and renewed life of obedience to God. He *taught* us to *pray* to His Father in heaven, whom we may call "*our Father*" by faith in Christ!

So *prayer*, dear listeners, is *the most important part of the thankfulness* God requires of us! Indeed, God commands us to pray! That's necessary! O sure, we know all about our deliverance from sin, and how that should incite us to obedience, to prayer, ... naturally; does it happen though? Our life so easily remains below the level, the standards, of gratitude God may expect. Of ourselves we don't pray, or hardly (just like we don't sing of ourselves too often). We don't express our thankfulness too frequently either, nor speak with God as often as we should. That's why it's good that God *requires* it of us! Then with prayer we don't just mean giving thanks for all *God's gifts*. True thankfulness also shows in our *eagerness* for our share in the *merits* Christ obtained for us. How else could you live according to the will of God as revealed in His commandments? Hence the Lord Jesus *commands* us to pray, where He says, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." That doesn't leave room for moods, for the notion that you'll have to feel like it, for you to pray. No, the LORD *requires* it! That's how He wants to be honoured and glorified! That's how He wants to see our awareness of all His gifts, His grace, His blessings of salvation, and see our thankfulness for them!

That's very understandable, you know. God created man to have *communion* with Him! Well, *communication* is the heart of true communion. Of all people, all generations, *we* should know that. There hasn't been an era in history in which *communication* was considered so essential! So if there is true communion through Christ with God, should we then not be *on speaking terms* with Him? By faith we may *walk* with the LORD; doesn't that show in our *talking* with Him? Look at all those people whom you see walking in the street, the mall, the store, or wherever, cell phone to their ear, and talking! Call upon the LORD, He says, for He wants us to *talk* to Him at any time and in every place! That's not a difficult command; it's *a natural call*! We *owe* it to be grateful for His deliverance! Imagine that a doctor helped us and healed us, would we go to a different doctor next time we need help? That would be very *ungrateful*! Should we then not show our thankfulness toward God in prayer by laying our whole life, our whole way before Him? Where else could we go for help, for strength, for rescue, but to God who wants to be *our Father* again through Christ by faith?! Indeed, those who are restored to God may know themselves His *children* by faith!

What, then, do we pray for? God is very particular about our prayers! It must be a *heartfelt* prayer, first of all. It also must be a prayer that expresses the *needs* we have learned to know from His Word! So, we pray, *not* according to our own feelings, with our self-designed needs, to the God we imagine, but our prayer must be in accordance to *God's Word!* Prayer is our *response of faith* to the LORD, in a life of obedience to Him. That whole life is *consecrated* to God and is laid before Him in prayer. When we don't ask properly, i.e. selfishly or in a self-centered way, instead of focussing on what God wants that we have; when we're only concentrated on ourselves; our prayers *won't be heard*. What, then are we going to pray for? For all things we *need* for body and soul in our new life with God our Father! What are those *needs*? The Lord Jesus taught us these needs and summarized them in the *Lord's Prayer!* It's a *lesson* in prayer, a *blue print* for prayer; in order that we may receive the help and strength to live for God's glory, serve in His kingdom, and do His will! Then He will fill all our *needs* as well for body and soul, through the forgiveness of sins, and in our struggle with temptations! He *will* hear that prayer, for in it we express that He again is the *King* in our life, that we live by His *power*, and to His *glory*, now and forever!