

**“a Thanksgiving meal,
on a normal day”**

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Courage Church, Detroit, MI**

I hope that everyone had a great weekend and a Happy Thanksgiving!

Today we are going to try and keep it really simple. Last week we finished our series on Jonah, and we really dug into that thing and tried to show all of the ways that we could apply that book of the ancient prophet to our lives today... and we sought to discover, “where do we fit in the story?”

and of course, this week was Thanksgiving.

I had an amazing time with my family this week, we went out of town, we saw family we hadn't seen all year, the kids got to see their cousins from New York who they miss dearly... we had just a great time.

and for me, I was just so thankful for the opportunity to be with family. To eat a wonderful meal together, to get to sleep in for a couple of days. It was just really great. We went to an indoor waterpark in Frankenmuth with the girls cousins on Friday, which was so wonderful.

And so like most people after a weekend like this, I am just thankful.

and I want to talk a little bit about the power of Thanksgiving. Because the reality is, giving thanks is one of the most life giving things that you can do for yourself, and it and is has the potential to be a huge part of your testimony.

If someone knows that you are thankful for them... that will open a door for them.

IF someone knows that in your life, there is a certain amount of suffering going on, a certain amount of hardship... if someone knows that you are going through something that not everybody else is necessarily going

through, and yet, through it you are constantly thankful... what that does is it points to something.

It points to a hope that most people don't have.

Because most people, when something in their life breaks, they don't know any better than to let it break them.

when you understand that it was on the day that you felt the most broken, that Jesus died so that you may have life...

that is when you can begin to understand what Thanksgiving actually means.

We are going to look at a moment when Paul and Silas are incredibly thankful, and what it leads to.

So a tiny bit of backstory leading up to the verse we are about to read. Paul and Silas are traveling... turning the world upside down for Jesus. They are going all over the place, and they found themselves in a place called Philippi which the bible describes as being a "leading city" in Macedonia which was a Roman Colony. So Philippi is under Roman rule... and they go into this place, and they start reaching people for Jesus. They reach a woman named Lydia (Acts 16:11-15) - and they baptized her... then they met a slave girl who the bible said had an evil Spirit in her, and she used that Spirit to be a fortune teller. And again, she was a slave girl and so her owners made a lot of money off of her...

but when she met Paul and Silas, she basically followed them around for days saying the same thing about them, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." (Acts 16:16) - and eventually, Paul and Silas got really annoyed, so they cast the spirit out of her, and immediately it left.

and of course, her owners were furious... because it meant that they were not going to be able to make any more money off of her. And so they grabbed Paul and Silas and they dragged them into the marketplace to turn them over to the government, and that is where we pick up.

At Acts 16:20-34 -

“And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, “These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice.” The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

The Philippian Jailer Converted

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone’s bonds were unfastened. When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried with a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.” And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and *he was baptized at once*, he and all his family. Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

Today’s sermon is called “A Thanksgiving meal, on a normal day.”

lets pray.

Pastor Kevin, our pastor in Lansing put out a video this week about Thanksgiving, and one of the things that he said in it that was so fascinating was, he said that “being thankful is good for every cell in your body.” and so I started looking into it a little... and found that it really is

true... it is so good for your body to be thankful... and to express gratitude, and even to just think about how grateful you are. It is good for your heart, it is good for your mind. It can lower blood pressure, it can boost your immune system, it can even reduce the effects that aging has on a person's brain. You likely will get more sleep, and certainly better rest, if you are thankful. I mean, how often are you kept awake at night over the things that you are thankful for?

Maybe you will have a random, amazing day that your adrenaline keeps you awake from excitement, but in a general way, we are kept awake at night from things like anxiety, and fear, and sadness. Thankfulness is usually something that we take for granted, if anything. It normally doesn't consume our thoughts or keep us up at night.

But I think maybe we would be better for it, if it did. If we thought about it more.

I remember, over ten years ago now, when Pastor Dave Williams introduced us to the concept of the Dream Journals, like we showed you guys this January, he always coupled it with sending out random thank you notes to people. And, I truly am not a CARD guy, so I kind of skipped over that one... but I can't help but wonder if he was onto something... because just to sit and count your blessings... it does something to you. To reflect on the things that God has done... the ways that he has been just so good to you... something about that has the power to overtake the circumstances that it feels like maybe are beating you in that moment.

And I have talked to a lot of people who just don't feel like they have that much to be thankful for. But if you try hard enough, I bet just about everyone in this room has more to be thankful for, than they do to complain about. For some, it takes a bit more digging and searching and seeking, than others. And I hope that this weekend you took some time to reflect in that way, and if not, then you still have the rest of today.

A couple of weeks ago, we took our discipleship students to New York City for a few days during the week. And I had a couple of reasons for wanting to get them to New York, one of those reasons was that I wanted to give them an opportunity to learn from my mentor, Pastor Brad Reed in a very

hands on and personal way. We did a couple of different sessions with him, and it was amazing.

But the other reason that I wanted to go there with them is I wanted them to see and experience first hand all of the ministries that they do there...

Because one thing that they do so well at the New York Dream Center is, they work with what they have. They don't let money or space get in the way of reaching people, and so I wanted our guys to shadow some of their ministries.

One of the things that they do, that they have done since Dawn and I were first a part of it seven years ago when we were flying from LA once a month to help, is something called adopt a block... and that basically just began by Pastor Brad and a few others knocking on peoples doors and asking "how can I serve you?"

and one lady needed her bathroom painted, so pastor Brad painted it. and it lead to others helping clean out apartments... a lot of people there are total hoarders and have piles and piles of things everywhere... and so the Dream Center would help them sort through it all... and they still do that... but it eventually lead to realizing that some people were just so lonely, and all they want is someone to spend a little time with them.

So the dream center sends a couple of people a couple times a week to sit and spend three hours at a time just being there for these people... consistently, a couple of times a week. Meeting needs if needed, cleaning if needed, just talking, when needed.

Anyway, the week that we were there, that Thursday afternoon, one of the ladies who they had been serving for a while invited everyone from the Dream Center, and our guys, up to her apartment on the 14th floor in the projects, for a "Thanksgiving dinner."

and so we all agreed to go up there... we wanted to go eat at Shake Shack, which, by the way, is coming to downtown Detroit in the Spring, so get ready for amazing burgers...

but we all went up there, mainly to be polite, and we all thought we would eat just a bit, and save room for shake shack... and when we got up there, it was the lady and a couple other ladies from their community, the five of us, and probably another 5 or 6 volunteers from the Dream Center, and she had all of us gather around, and sing worship songs together. Then, she went one by one and had everyone offer some sort of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord... she wanted each of us to do a song, but if we didn't sing, she was content with us explaining what we were thankful for.

When we got to Spencer, he gave everybody a wonderful song about beating the devil up with bible verses... I poorly shot a video of it so that we could all share in the moment together. Here it is: (VIDEO)

when we got to this lady (at the end of Spencers video) - she just melted my heart... she began talking about how she was still, after four years, just so incredibly grateful for the way that the dream center stepped in during Hurricane Sandy in their community.

Because the Dream Center had already been doing adopt a block there for years before Sandy, but what happened at the Chelsea-Eliot houses is, after the Hurricane, they were left with no power for about a week. Which meant no elevators... and some people's apartments were as high as 21 flights of stairs in the air... a lot of these people were very old and some were restricted to wheel chairs so they had no way of really even leaving their apartments, but what we did was for several days we delivered food and blankets and anything that we could think of to everyones apartments. We knocked on every single door to make sure that nobody was all alone with no food and freezing, then, when the power came back on, and fridges started working again, we re-stocked everyones fridges with food, milk, cheese, etc. because everything in their fridges had been spoiled.

and so now, all these years later, this woman remembered that. More than anything. And when she had to think about what she was grateful for, that is where her mind went.

And the reason that I, today, am so thankful for that moment a few weeks ago and hearing that from that lady, is because so often in my life, the Devil just pounds me with a guilt that says:

“you aren’t really making a difference.”

“There is no real impact.”

“Nobody is actually changing”

“What good are you actually making?”

But to sit there in a room full of people and hear that kind of thankfulness in someone I had been a part of helping many years ago, *that* set another fire in me for how the simple things go a lot further than we realize.

Finally, the lady who hosted the dinner gave her thanks, and though she didn't mention the hurricane, but she too was just so thankful that she was not forgotten about. That people still cared enough to visit her, and talk to her, and even learn from her.

And she made sure to return the gesture, and she offered her home to all of us, and offered to be a listening ear and even to give some of that wisdom that comes with the years, if anyone needed anything. And then she served us dinner.

a turkey dinner, that she had worked on all day long just to bless the people who bless her every day. The people who give her what she does not think that she deserves, every day.

And that spoke volumes to me. and as we were walking away from her apartment and heading toward shake shack, man, I was so blessed.

Austin came up to me, and said “dude, I think I saw a cockroach crawling on that turkey.”

A text message or something would have been really appreciated there BEFORE I ate the food... but yeah...

and even though that is really gross, it did something to me... to realize that someone who lives in such rough circumstances every day, used what she

did have to prepare what she would consider to have been a first class meal for 15 people. Just to say *thanks*.

and not even worrying about if I was going to feel the affects of the food later or not, I left that place thankful.

Like grace had fallen on all of us to even be able to be a part of seeing someone so happy.

It truly was a Thanksgiving meal, on a normal day.

You get the word thanksgiving in the New Testament in Luke 22, Jesus is about to take the passover meal with the disciples, and it says that he took a cup, and after he had “given thanks” he tells them to divide it between them and drink. and then the same thing with the bread... he took the bread, and after he had “given thanks” he broke the bread and distributed it to the disciples.

It is the Greek word *eucharisteō*

and it, course course, is where we get the word Eucharist from.

The centerpiece of Holy Communion is Thanksgiving.

and *eucharisteō* is a very loaded word, it is really quite amazing.

The root word is the Greek word *charis* which means “grace.”

Unmerited favor. The greatest gift of all. So Jesus saw that final meal with his disciples as a gift, which is fascinating when you consider the circumstances by which the meal had come. It was going to be their final meal together before Jesus would die. Jesus knew his time had come, and yet he stopped, in the middle of a journey that obviously was leading to a cross, and he counted his blessings.

He didn't see the moment of the darkness that was surely coming, he saw a moment with his closest friends.

So the root word of *eucharisteō* is the word grace... but there is another Greek word also packed in there, and that is the word “*chara*”

So *eucharisteō* is *charis*, and *chara*.

Charis is grace, and *chara* is JOY.

Not happiness. Joy. Happiness is circumstantial, but the bible describes Joy as something that can be made complete through Jesus. James epistle says that you can, and SHOULD count it all joy when you face trials! Because of what they produce in you.

What that verse in James is trying to do is break you of the hold that circumstances tend to have on human nature. We tend to be bound to our present realities, instead of seeing a bigger picture.

But if you live your whole life pursuing happiness then you won't count it all joy when you face something because it will momentarily get in the way of whatever it is that you are going after that you think will make you happy.

But people who have Joy have it because they know that even when everything doesn't go exactly the way that they saw it in their minds, they know that the gospel is the Joy news. It is news that promises you something far more than whatever you can achieve here in this momentary life.

Jesus says it like this “NO ONE CAN TAKE YOUR JOY FROM YOU.”

Because nobody can take from you the fact that you are a child of God, and that your joy is not based on your circumstances. And it is when you actually can get your mind around that, that you can rejoice even when everyone thinks you should be mourning.

You can rejoice, when you get thrown into prison because you cast a demon out of a fortune teller.

This what what we read at the beginning in Acts 16... lets look at a couple of parts to this:

“The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. When **they had inflicted many blows upon them,** they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. ²⁴ Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.”

So Paul and Silas were not just thrown in prison. First they were stripped of their clothes, and were beaten by a crowd of angry people, with rods. Notice that first line, the crowd *joined* in attacking them... then right here,

“They had inflicted many blows upon them”

and after all of that, they put them in prison.

The thing that makes Paul and Silas’ story so powerful in the jail that day, is that they have joy through all of it.

When everything about their circumstance should lead them to depression or anxiety, instead they have peace... and so they start thanking God. And praising.

Because:

Thanksgiving is how we manifest joy in our world.

It is how we point to something bigger... Not just to our gratitude for what we do have, but also to us knowing that God is on the throne even when we are locked in a jail cell. And even when we are confused about where we fit into God’s plan... Even when we feel like nothing is happening in even remotely the timeframe that we thought that it should or in the way that we thought that it should... and even when our boilers explode and water comes out of all of the radiators and suddenly we have no heat for days... which is what happened at Drew’s house where He and all of our discipleship students live, and Tevin lives there too.

Because even when we get stripped of everything that we think that we need... we still have more than most.

So the question is, are you able to reach into your circumstances, and pull out Thanksgiving?

Look at this:

Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and **the prisoners were listening to them**, and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here."

This is what is so fascinating about this. Paul and Silas used this opportunity to praise God, proving to everyone that circumstances do not dictate their reality.

and the thought may be... well, "Isn't my circumstance, my reality?"

but if you look at this, you realize, it isn't. If you look at this, you see, reality was far bigger than the circumstance. Paul and Silas' reality was that everywhere they were going, the gospel was moving forward. And because of that, they didn't care where their circumstances lead them. They embraced every moment as a gift from God.

They are here in jail, praising God. Thanking him... singing hymns,

and the bible says that EVERYONE was listening to them.

then God moves in a mighty way, and changes their circumstances. It was a God style prison break. The kind where the prisoners DON'T escape when when they can. Because staying meant that someone else could get saved.

So even though the doors were opened and their chains were literally loosed, they didn't go anywhere.

It is no secret that in that day, if a prison guard lost a prisoner, he would be put to death... so this guard immediately moved to put his sword to himself because he knew that Rome was ruthless, and it was better to do it quick. But Paul cried out and said "We are still here."

Because the objective was not to escape their circumstances, their objective was to be thankful through them. And it was a testimony to everyone in that prison. And even when the doors swung open, they did not leave. They stayed, and instead, used it as an opportunity to share the gospel. Because the joy that was in Paul and Silas' hearts was too good to keep to themselves. They were so thankful that Jesus had met them in their mess, that it was literally bursting out of them.

and look at the result:

the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and *he was baptized at once*, he and all his family.

Thanksgiving in the midst of being imprisoned, lead to God moving mightily and supernaturally in that jail cell.

which lead to Paul teaching the guard about what grace looks like...

Grace looks like staying in a jail cell when you have the power to walk out.

But that power would have cost the guard everything, and instead, the guard ended up WITH EVERYTHING.

and suddenly, it was him who was filled WITH THANKSGIVING. So much so, that the bible says that he immediately washed their wounds... You need to think about that for a moment. This man became so filled with the grace of God, that he, the jail keeper, began washing the wounds of those

in his attendance... the wounds that this man's people had inflicted on them before handing them over to him.

and He, and His entire family got saved, and baptized.

And I love the way that Luke puts this when he is writing in the book of Acts. He says that the man "was baptized AT ONCE, he and his family."

It was like he thought, "If God is that good, that he would perform a miracle that set these prisoners free, yet at the same time His grace filled the heart of those same prisoners so much so that they decided NOT to go free when they easily had could..." Then I need more of THAT GOD, and I need it now. Without hesitation.

Jesus describes Joy like this in John's gospel... he describes it like a woman giving birth, who may have sorrow in a moment, because labor hurts...

but when the time comes to give birth, there is no stopping it. There is no waiting... you don't say to the baby, "could you wait another 3 months" no, when the time comes to deliver it, the mother delivers it.

and that is the way that it is with Joy, it can't be stopped for those who have it. And when it comes, you won't remember that you were even in jail, or that the boiler exploded, or that your bills came in too high this month. Because your circumstances did not dictate your attitude of thanksgiving.

That was Jesus. He knew that he was going to die on a cross for our sins. Because the wages of sin is death, and somebody had to pay... but by the grace of God Jesus allowed himself to be that for us... and in the moments leading up to the death that he knew was coming, Jesus gave thanks. Because what he was going to accomplish was bigger than a momentary pain, even as horrible as it was.

Everything about the gospel is enough to give thanks wherever you find yourself today, and the moment that it takes ahold of you, everything changes, all at once.

It is why we are able to have Thanksgiving on a normal day, not just one weekend in November every year. Because Thanksgiving is a lifestyle of remembering that we have what we have only because of Jesus, and his plans for us go so far beyond anything that we can imagine.

and when you come to that reality... of just how good Jesus is... there is nothing you can do but change. There is nothing you can do but be grateful.

The jail guard, he was so grateful, he thought right away, I OWE THIS GOD EVERYTHING! And he immediately had to get baptized. It was all that he knew to do after experiencing that.

It was like, he experienced grace, and all that he could think about was "WHAT IS NEXT?"

"How do I show my Thanksgiving?"

"How do I go all in? Because there is no way that this is not real!"

Next Sunday, we are going to be doing baptisms at Courage Church.

Even Jesus began his ministry by being baptized... it is a simple public declaration that says "God, I am in. I am yours. I am different, and I am public about it."

And in the bible days, like with that guard, what you had were pagans, and on the other side of it, overtly religious people who tried to work their way to salvation.... and on another side you had soldiers who tried to take over the world through violence, which is likely who this prison guard was... most prison guards were retired soldiers...

you had all of these people who knew their old lives had to done.

and what people were saying when they were baptized, is "That life that I have always known, is now over."

It is not the same thing as Salvation. But it is a public decree that says "Jesus is Lord and I am going to do everything that I can do serve him with my life."

The old life is washed away. It is gone. From now on, "I serve Jesus."

because I am so grateful for what He did on the cross for me, how could I live for anything else?

We are going to give you a chance to make that same declaration next Sunday... we are doing water baptisms... a few of you have already signed up... you can sign up in the back for it if you want to make that public declaration.

The great commission that Jesus left us with is to go into all the world and make disciples, BAPTIZING THEM in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

so we are going to do that next week.

But today, I just want to close with everybody closing your eyes... and taking a few moments to remember what Jesus did for us. And to in your mind and in your hearts, say thank you to him. Say it 100 times if you have to, to make it click.

Because just like Paul, who could have left that cell, and let that prison guard die... Jesus could have left that cross... he didn't even need to go to it. He could have at any moment called down an army of angels to fight on his behalf... but instead, he went to the cross. Instead, he stayed on the cross.

So if you are at a point in your life that you feel like you don't have anything left to be thankful for... be thankful for that.

eucharisteō - it is grace, and it is joy. It is why we gather together, and break bread together, and eat meals together, and study the word together. It was the last thing that the prison guard is recorded as doing... after

cleaning their wounds, and getting baptized... he made them a meal. It was Thanksgiving on a normal day. *eucharisteō* - *Eucharist. Thanksgiving.*

Because we are thankful for the cross of Jesus Christ.

It is why we should have Thanksgiving on normal days, and it is why we take communion EVERY day that we meet here together. Because every day is grace.