

Lesson 3

Being Grateful for God's Providence

Introduction

The time of the Exodus from Egypt is recorded in Exodus 13-15. It's an amazing account of heroism and faith. God's people had been subject to severe mistreatment and brutality. They cried out for deliverance. God heard their cry and worked through Moses to bring them to deliverance. As soon as they left Egypt, they were pursued by Pharaoh's army. As they headed east toward the Red Sea, they reached a momentous moment of difficulty. Boxed in by mountain ranges on either side, the sea in front of them, and the army rapidly advancing from behind . . . all appeared lost. That is, until God got involved.

As you read the Exodus account, I think you see a great example of God's strong desire to display His great power as reassurance that He was with them every step of the way. Have you ever thought about the purpose of His leading them through the wilderness on the way to Canaan's Land? If you've ever looked at a map, there were much easier and direct ways to get to the promised land. But God took them the long way to teach them to depend on Him and to trust in His power, not their own, to provide them with everything they needed to be successful.

Exodus 14 details their crossing of the Red Sea. Moses tells them:

"Don't be afraid. Stand firm and see the Lord's salvation that he will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians you see today, you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and you must be quiet."

– Exodus 14.13-14

Exodus 14.19-31 provides the details of what happened that day. What is said at the end of the chapter is especially important:

That day the LORD saved Israel from the power of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. When Israel saw the great power that the LORD used against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD and believed in him and in his servant Moses.

– Exodus 14.30-31

Can you imagine the feelings of thankfulness the nation must have had that day? If it were me I believe my thankfulness would be so great that I couldn't help but break forth in praise to God. This is exactly what Moses and Miriam did as you read the first 21 verses of Exodus 15.

How long did these feelings last?

Exodus 15.22 says three days. Think of it . . . three days! Moses led the people away from the sea. They came to Marah unable to find drinkable water. Then the grumbling begins. They begin to question the same God that just 72 hours earlier had delivered them through one of the greatest miracles of all time: the parting of the Red Sea. Now they're out of water. And immediately the doubts start coming back to the surface. Verse 24 reports: *the people grumbled to Moses, "what are we going to drink?"*

Who are you? Are you a person who is thankful at the moment and then becomes regretful right after?

Thankfulness Recognizes the Good That God Works

- Through God’s providence, you have received deliverance (Colossians 1.13) and forgiveness (Ephesians 1.7). How thankful are you for His provision in giving you a way out of sin?
- Through God’s providence in how He placed people, situations, and life events that led you to Him. Think of some specifics. How will you give thanks?
 - a. Who are the people?
 - b. What are the situations?
 - c. What are the life events?
- Through God’s providence He has blessed you with everything you need to be successful spiritually. How will you give thanks?
 - a. What are some of the things/talents He has blessed you with?
 - b. Who are some of the people who have helped you develop these things?
- Through God’s providence He has blessed you with a spiritual family. That family is there for your support, encouragement, and growth. How will you give thanks?
 - a. What are some of the ways your spiritual family has equipped you and helped you to move on to maturity?
 - b. Who are some of the people in that family who have been instrumental in your success?
- Think of other areas of your life where God’s providence has been at work. How will you give thanks?

Upon what will you focus? Will it be the good? Or will we murmur about our weaknesses and problems? How happy are we for what God has done?

Do everything without grumbling and arguing, so that you may be blameless and pure, children of God who are faultless in a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine like stars in the world,

– Philippians 2.14-15

The Example of Paul

I believe Paul presents us with a great example of the great contrast that should be developing in us as it relates to before/after our salvation.

Before salvation, Paul was:

- Confident in himself: Philippians 3.4-6.
- Arrogant and boastful: Galatians 1.13-14.
- Cocky, looking down on those who were not like him, Acts 8.1-3; 9.1-2.

Simply put, there appears to be no thankfulness in his heart. But what do we see after his salvation?

Paul was:

- Concerned about the lost souls of others: Romans 10.

- More concerned about knowing Christ than exalting himself: Philippians 3.7-14.
- Moving from the viewpoint that he was the *worst of sinners*, 1 Timothy 1.15.
- Teaching the need for submission to Christ and to all people, Ephesians 5.21; Colossians 3.15, 17.

As you think about the change that came over Paul please make the application to how he was expressing his thankfulness for the work of God in his life. Through God’s direct action in saving Him and then through an incalculable number of indirect actions God took . . . Paul was completely transformed. The realization of God’s relocation of his soul and the changing of his status to *forgiven* yielded a spirit of great thankfulness in his heart. The desire to murmur and complain diminished because he saw the working of God was so great and powerful, there was nothing negative left worth focusing on.

Will we choose to be content?

I don’t say this out of need, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I find myself. I know how to make do with little, and I know how to make do with a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content—whether well fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need. I am able to do all things through him who strengthens me.

– Philippians 4.11-13

For Thought and Reflection

1. What does Exodus 14 indicate to us about the eagerness of God to demonstrate His power for His people? How can having that in mind help us today as we learn to depend on God more?
2. How soon did it take for Israel to murmur after crossing the Red Sea?
3. What are some things we can do to decrease the frequency of our murmuring or griping?
4. What are some ways you can express your thankfulness for God’s providence in bringing you to salvation?
5. Who are some of the people He placed in your life to facilitate your salvation?

6. What are some of the life situations and circumstances He allowed you to go through in order to soften your heart for salvation?

7. How is this creating inside of you a spirit of thanksgiving?

8. How did God go to work changing the life of Paul ... as to how he was before salvation to after his salvation?

9. What can we learn from this great change in Paul?

10. Do we ever really have the right to complain or gripe about things?