

# Grateful for the Work of Others

A Sermon by Rev. Joel Christian Glenn

Sunday, 15 October, 2023

## Children's Talk: Why Say Thank You?

**Luke 17:11** Now it happened as He went to Jerusalem that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. <sup>12</sup> Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. <sup>13</sup> And they lifted up *their* voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"

**Luke 17:14** So when He saw *them*, He said to them, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed.

**Luke 17:15** And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, <sup>16</sup> and fell down on *his* face at His feet, giving Him thanks [εὐχαριστέω]. And he was a Samaritan.

**Luke 17:17** So Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where *are* the nine? <sup>18</sup> Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?" <sup>19</sup> And He said to him, "Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well."

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What are you grateful for? For all that there is evil and hardship in the world, we also have an immense amount of good to be grateful for. All of this good is from the Lord, intentionally and directly. I know that sometimes I slip into thinking that the Lord provides good things in the same way the sun provides light: thoughtlessly, without any intention; yet every good thing is not just from the Lord, it is personally prepared and intentionally given; and that is true of every last little thing that is truly good. We could spend forever talking about these good things; but today our focus will be on the people through whom the Lord provides what is good, and how we can show appreciation and gratitude for these people.

Quite a lot of the good in our lives comes through other people. It's not something we think about a lot, but one could ask why? Why doesn't the Lord just do good to us directly? It would certainly seem to be more efficient than working through all these flawed, limited, at times stubborn and belligerent, people. The Heavenly Doctrines of the New Church explain why it is, and it turns out that it has nothing to do with a limitation in the Lord and everything to do with what the Lord wants to give to people:

The Lord does each and all things from Himself directly, and indirectly through heaven. That He acts indirectly through heaven is not because He needs their aid, but that the angels there may have functions and duties, and consequently life and happiness in accordance with their duties and uses. From this there is an appearance to them that they act from themselves, but a perception that it is from the Lord. (*Secrets of Heaven* §8719)

The Lord does not need the help of others, in this passage specifically the angels.

And yet He still works through them so that they can have the full experience of being useful and finding joy in that. They even realize that it isn't really them doing

the work, and yet the mere appearance or sensation of doing the Lord's work is enough to fill them with happiness and delight.

We don't have to look far to find examples of people doing the Lord's work. Consider the people who make this church work. Just this morning, we have someone operating the camera to ensure that everyone online can join in; we have a guy on the sound desk making sure that we can sing our songs, and so that I can be heard. Someone has taken the time to acquire, arrange, and display flowers to bring some of the beauty of the Lord's creation into the service. Our usher is on hand to welcome and to assist people as they come in. Right now two people are giving up their time in church to be with the little children, sharing with them stories from the Lord's Word in a loving and safe setting. Later there will be tea and eats provided and served. That's more than half a dozen people, who you might hardly even notice, and yet each one of them is doing the Lord's work; and without them, this work would not get done. We would not have this special church.

It doesn't end there of course. There are the volunteers who fill the boards and the committees and pastor's council, who ensure that we have a solid foundation and a secure future. There are the countless helpers who turn up to make sure that events run smoothly. Many, many, people give, both of their money and of their time. Then there are just those who (and really I think that is all of us) who simply live the church, who love their neighbour as themselves and the Lord above all else; the moms and dads who instil love and wisdom in their children; the families who adopt a stray now and again; the friends who drop everything and step up when trouble arises. It doesn't even end there! We could look to the past, the people who went before, who built up this church out of passion and love, and then handed it off to the next generation. All of these people have heard the Lord's call, and

responded. I am in awe of the amazing blessings that have come to this church through the people who make it up. As the Lord taught,

For in this the saying is true: "One sows and another reaps." I sent you to reap that for which you have not laboured; others have laboured, and you have entered into their labours. (John 4:37-38)

We have entered into the labours of so many, that we could not possibly begin to express the full level of gratitude that they deserve.

Hopefully though we can show some measure of this gratitude; and in doing so it is worth giving thought to whom the gratitude is due. As I have said many times already, the good itself comes from the Lord, and from the Lord alone. So is it really Him we should be thanking, as opposed to other people? I remember hearing stories that perhaps illustrates how uncomfortable that would feel if taken to an extreme: a fiercely Christian family is visited by a doctor, who cures their son of some disease. When they realize their son has been saved, they instantly turn to praise the Lord, and ignore the doctor utterly. It's as if the doctor has done nothing whatsoever for them. Now hopefully the doctor could take comfort in a job well done without needing any personal praise. It truly is the Lord who does the actual healing, after all. But again, I think this idea of ignoring the people doing the work on the ground as it were doesn't sit well. There needs to be a way of acknowledging the Lord as the true source while still also honouring the individual through whom the good has come.

Each individual who willingly opens themselves to the Lord first had to make a free choice. Even as we show gratitude to the Lord as the source, we can show gratitude to the individual as the conduit. Apart from individuals making those free choices none of the Lord's goodness would get through to us. When we give thanks to or for a specific person it is a recognition that a person has willingly allowed the Lord to work through them, and a show that it is appreciated, a confirmation that it

has made a difference. The Heavenly Doctrines confirm that when we see some use that is worthy of gratitude, we should also extend that gratitude to the individual who performed said use:

As any one loves, esteems, and honours the use he also loves, esteems, and honours the person with whom the use is connected; also that the person is loved, esteemed and honoured in the measure in which he ascribes the use to the Lord and not to himself; for to that extent he is wise, and the uses he performs he performs from good. (*Heaven and Hell* §390)

We get to this point by always making gratitude about the actual use or good thing a person as done; the result is the focus, not the person who accomplished it; the person is then honoured by extension.

The other side of this equation is how do we receive gratitude? Receiving gratitude is surprisingly challenging for many people. We are so trained to not be arrogant or prideful that we can deny the thanks that is given to us. There is something healthy in this: as that passage said, the person being thanked ascribes the use to the Lord, not to himself. We all know that we aren't really the source of the good things that we do. The problem arises when in an attempt to ascribe all good things to the Lord we deny the good things themselves. We can become so self-deprecating, so bent on not taking any credit, that we downplay not just our role in bringing about the good thing but the good thing itself.

Perhaps one way out of this hole is, when receiving things, to join in showing appreciation for the good thing as well. As the Gospel of John says,

And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. (John 4:36)

In other words, the person who sowed the seed in the first place and the one who benefitted from it both rejoice together in the harvest. Likewise, both the recipient and the doer of a good deed can rejoice that a good deed has been done. Instead of responding to gratitude with denial, perhaps there is a way of responding with still

more gratitude: gratitude that the Lord has used us to do something good, and gratitude that something good has been done in the first place. Not only that, the Lord *wants* you to enjoy doing good things. Remember, He could do it all on His own! But He calls us to take part so that we can share in that joy. When someone says, “thank you,” and that “thank you” fills you with satisfaction, it doesn’t need to be arrogant: it can instead be a very healthy enjoyment of having the good things you have done confirmed. Receive gratitude with appreciation and still more gratitude. Don’t deny the good things the Lord is doing through you, even as you also remember that He is the true source of all good things.

We could take for granted that the Lord is always providing good things; He will never stop. Yet when we take the time to express our gratitude, we affirm those good things, and reinforce them, and put ourselves in a position to receive even more of them. Let’s remember to show that same gratitude to the people through whom the Lord does the good things, so that we can affirm, reinforce, and open ourselves up to even more good from the people around us.