

Unending Thanks

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 February 2023

Preacher: Jess McManus

[0 : 00] Unending thanks. I wish my kids knew unending thanks. No, they're pretty good to be fair. Like them, I was brought up to mind my P's and my Q's.

But generally, I think you'll all agree, we say thank you for something when we like it, when we are pleased with what we receive. Rarely do we say, thank you for this raw chicken I'm about to eat. We just don't. When things are bad, why would we be thankful for that? But life, it's a funny onion. Life is up, life is down.

So to be thankful for life's ups, I completely get. But to be thankful for life's downs, not so much. But thankfully, this is not what this reading is about. It is not about knowing stress and sadness and being grateful and glad for it.

[1 : 04] No. It is understanding that you may have stress. You may have awful sadness, heartbreak. But knowing in that, that God has you, that you can be grateful for.

It is about focusing on Him and not the waves that feel like they try to take us down. When we focus on Him and we praise Him, we are thanking Him because He is with us in the lows.

When reading this psalm, the image of a puzzle piece, not fitting, came to mind. But because of a recent experience. So the other day, I was doing a puzzle.

And this piece, would it fit? Would it work? And I was convinced that was where it was going to go. And I tried. And I must have spent about half an hour focusing on this piece.

Can anyone else relate to that? Convinced. But for that half an hour, what did I focus on?

[2 : 13] Did I focus on the beautiful puzzle? No. Did I focus on this piece that was either cut wrong, in the box, and it shouldn't have been. Whatever the excuse, it was someone else's fault and not mine.

I lost my focus. I'd stopped enjoying my puzzle. But how often is life like that? Expectations, hopes, plans, experiences, relationships, decisions that do not go to plan.

What do we then focus on when that happens? Or we see or we focus on maybe the fact that things are just not okay.

That it's not fair. That our plans have gone down the toilet. That our hearts are in pieces. Our sleep is broken. And for some of us, that was just January. So to respond with sadness.

To respond to hardship with heartbreak is such a natural thing. In our reading, we hear, they cried out. It went wrong. They cried out.

[3 : 20] It's okay to cry out. But praise God, we are here today because we worship a supernatural God. And in him, there is another way to respond.

There is hope. There is purpose. And boy, is that something to be thankful for. With our theme of unending thanks and our reading, we hear of major distress.

Hopelessness, deep depression, darkness, life ebbing away, rivers turning to deserts, storms taking over, complete distraction, I'm still going, ruined loss, being blinded by error, affliction.

And that was just one psalm. It's not great, is it? There is not much to be thankful for in that.

And sadly, those experiences are not just contained to that psalm, are they? There is not much to be thankful for in that. There is not much to be thankful for in that. So my hope for you today is right now, none of you can relate to that.

[4 : 29] I would love that dearly for every one of us. However, you might. And sadly, I expect quite a few of us in this room can relate to that.

And if not you, maybe that person that barked at you in the supermarket when you bought your milk, this morning, if not them, it will be loved ones, it will be friends, family, it will be colleagues. They will know that sadness and that darkness. We think of Martin's prayers in the two topics, Ukraine, Turkey, such sadness, such darkness.

So what should our response to the darkness be? Are you ready? We need to eat it up for breakfast. I am so serious.

We need to give thanks to God, for he is good. His love endures everything forever. We need to take advice and encouragement from the psalm.

[5 : 44] We are either up or down right now. So, to those of us who are up, to those of us who feel redeemed, who know they're redeemed, well, that's quite an amazing thing, isn't it?

To be redeemed, we've exchanged on what I believe is one of the biggest, best deals ever. We have exchanged our despair for hope.

We have exchanged darkness for light. That is amazing. So let's sing about it.

Let's love our neighbours. If we are up and our loved ones are down, let's go love them. Let's sing about it. Let's care for them.

Because we know what it's like to be bashed and battered by the waves. We, the redeemed, have to love our neighbour. We have to draw near. We have to help.

[6 : 47] We need to hold their hands in the wave and bring them to Jesus. Why? Because this is what God asked us to do. This is how Jesus taught us to live.

By being his hands and his feet on earth. But for those of us who aren't feeling it. For those of us who are feeling pretty darn low.

For those of us who are wandering, stuck in a loop, finding no way to settle. For us who feel in trouble, distressed, broken or near a broken point.

Or that we feel like the waves are relentless. Hold on. Hold on to God for dear life. Turn to him.

Turn to him. He longs to comfort you. He adores you. He loves you. He will never leave you. So turn to him. If you are feeling low, hear this today.

[7 : 49] And know it's for you. Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble. And he saved them from their distress. He sent out his word and healed them.

He rescued them from the grave. Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love. If you feel low today, you need to know this.

That God loves you and he will never leave you nor forsake you. So pray. Talk to him. Pray now where you're set or pray after the service with someone. So we're up, we're down and we're everything in between.

Our reading continues. And we hear of all sorts of perils, struggles. Some things completely out of our hands. We could never have predicted it.

But sometimes what takes our eyes off of God can be of our own making. The foes that we face at some point, maybe we chose.

[9 : 01] The distractions, the choices we gave too much weight to. Our rebellious ways we have made fools of ourselves, it says in the reading.

But know this, God saves. He forgives. It is never too late to turn to him. To say sorry. To ask for help. Help. So if you're sat here thinking, yeah, I've messed up.

Or yeah, I'm pretty distracted. Do not lose hope. Turn to God. And when you do thank him for his grace, give thanks for his unending love for you.

So give unending thanks. Thank him that in the storm you didn't drown. Thank him that there is unending mercy, unending forgiveness, unending love, unending hope.

And I bet you wish this would stop and end right now. No, I'm only kidding. But when you know that unending love, go tell your friends.

[10 : 05] Go tell your neighbours. Go tell your colleagues. Because I can guarantee you they're not feeling it and they need to. Life is nothing short of amazing.

Really. It is such a gift. But rarely is it what we plan for. Never is it just, so-so.

Never is it really kind of normal, is it? But today we're sat here, we have air in our lungs, and we can start and thank God for that, right?

We worship an amazing God. We follow a radical son. And we live with the Holy Spirit guiding us. I thank God for that.

Life always will be up and down. And as children of God, we know we are in the world, not of the world. So while we are in the world, while we know the ups and the catastrophic downs, let's not conform to the pattern of this world, but challenge it.

[11 : 26] Let's seek God in everything and thank Him, because He is with us in everything. In today's reading, we have read of darkness and despair.

But we have also heard when people cry out that He is gathered, redeemed, led, loved with an unfailing love.

Satisfied the thirsty and the hungry, broken chains, performed wonderful deeds, healed, rescued, I'm still going. Stilled storms, turned deserts into pools, increased blessings, lifted the lowly.

And that is true for every one of us. He is an amazing God. So today, I want to encourage every one of us.

In life's ups and downs, the planned and the unplanned. Know that God is with you and praise Him. But if you can't see Him.

[12 : 34] Yeah, I said that. If you can't see Him. If it is too dark right now. Just hear this. God is for you.

So who can be against you? God is for you. God is for you. So who can be against you?

Know that in everything, God has and will work for the good of those He loves. And neither death, nor life, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So today, tomorrow, next week, give thanks to the Lord our God in the highs and in the lows. And in the lows. Because He is in them with us.

And His love endures forever. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.