

Into the Unknown with Gratitude

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[0 : 0 0] we do not know what to do but our eyes are on you that's what they say in that situation of facing these threats and not quite knowing what's going to happen we do not know what to do lord but our eyes are on you what might that look like do you ever get an email or a letter from somebody and it ends with that in the the actual letter or email they're they're asking you to do something and then there's a phrase at the end of it apparently this is a phrase that really really gets on people's nerves okay the phrase is this after they've asked you to do something they then sign off by saying thank you in advance apparently that's a phrase that we really don't like very much and the reason why we don't like it very much is because it's it's loaded it sounds it can sound presumptuous and um it puts the recipient under some pressure it's kind of hard to say no to what's being asked uh it demands something of a yes and um i was reading about this apparently there were some suggestions are made as to alternatives that can be used in that situation an alternative could be um do you think you'll have time to do this for me or i appreciate your help in this situation but that phrase thank you in advance can be a phrase that can really really get people's backs up my apologies if i've ever signed off an email like that question is in this situation we've got the people of god who are surrounded by enemies and they're about to be obliterated and their response is to start giving thanks to god to march into that situation where humanly speaking it looks like they're about to all be killed and they give thanks to god for the victory that they believe he is going to give them they give thanks to god in advance in anticipation that they are going to be saved from death is there a sense in which it seems to have all the signs of a thank you in advance what i want to suggest is that there's something really important about faith and thanksgiving that actually does involve that sort of prayer that sort of dynamic but not in a presumptuous kind of way but rather there's something about that that has something really important when it comes to christian hope and christian expectation so let's just unpack this over these next few minutes is what might that mean to dare to give thanks to god before we are actually aware of how he's going to resolve a given situation the first thing that we need we can pull from this this story is something that is repeated as the story unfolds that we must know that the lord will fight this battle that's what they're told they're told the lord will fight this battle they don't quite know how it's going to happen as it unfolds it turns out that the enemies just turn against each other and wipe each other out but they don't know that at this point they're simply told to have faith that the situation that they are facing right now does not belong to them the pressure is not something that they need to feel themselves because it is god's battle now we've got to perhaps be really careful where we how we handle that kind of idea when it comes to faith facing our daily battles whatever they may be that this is not yours to fight god's going to

fight it for you it's important we understand that what we're not talking about here is some kind of passive spirituality where we just remove ourselves from anything and we just hand it over to god and say well it's got nothing to do with me god's just going to sort it out back in the 1970s there was a brazilian goalkeeper who was a christian and he used to be quite visible in the way he would pray before matches he didn't pray before he came out onto the field he would actually get out to the field get into the goal uh get between the pope the goal posts and get down on his knees close his eyes look upwards and pray for everyone in the stadium to see one particular occasion because everybody knew he did this and um one particular occasion i can't remember what team it was they were playing but they were um they wised up to it and they thought here's an opportunity so the match started and this guy was still down on his knees with his eyes closed praying and somebody from the halfway line decided to chance a shot the pope went straight into the neck that's not the kind of image that we're talking about when it comes to handing everything over to god it's not about closing our eyes and removing ourselves from the situation when it comes to to engage when it comes to handing something over to god that's actually a very active thing it takes a huge amount of courage to let go of control it's not about giving up but it is about giving over to god and we read in verse 17 of that passage um god says to the people look take your position and stand still tomorrow go out against them in other words they're being called to go into this situation to take their position but that position is one of handing over to god that might seem quite a challenging thing to do because it is it takes a huge amount of courage to let go of control and not to give up but to give it over to god i'm going to share with you a story which is um i'll be honest with you it's quite a weird one and i was in two minds as to whether to use it this morning because it can seem so removed from perhaps everyday experience including my own that i was thinking does it connect but i think it i think it i think it's quite an important story so i'm going to share it with you it happened about um 30 years ago when i was a student and i was involved with the christian union um this is when i was at university and we had a mission uh a mission week to the student community and um we uh as part of uh that mission week we had a number of different speakers coming to uh talk about a number of different subjects we have one particular um person that drew quite a lot of attention because of her story because she was previously a witch and she was quite a prominent witch and she had an experience of christ she became a christian and her ministry was one of going around to various different places sharing her story of how she had turned from witchcraft to christ and this particular occasion she was coming to speak um with our christian union to the student community now this was the days long before social media but still word got out and um a lot of people a lot of students came piled into the uh the the common room that um for this event but also quite a few

people from the local witch's coven turned up and um there were quite a few of them dotted around the room and as this woman began to speak and to give her share her story um they began to get quite vocal now i need to say there weren't any pointed hats in the room but there were quite a few very very vocal hecklers and this kind of began to get sort of out of control there was quite a lot of noise quite a lot of people shouting out i don't eventually um she said okay we're just going to pause now and then we're going to come back in a moment hopefully in a more orderly fashion and people can ask me any questions now i'd been involved in organizing this event and um just as much she said that and she kind of paused everything for a moment she then turned to me and she said you'll be okay to come and uh just chair this discussion won't you now i was pretty new to public speaking in those days and i was absolutely terrified i had not a clue what i was going to say or what i was going to do and immediately i felt plunged a million miles out of my depth i decided to just grab a few moments uh outside just somewhere quiet and i i went just outside the moment i did there were two people who i'd never seen before or since who just came up to me and they said that we won't worry about introductions we're just from one of the local churches and uh we know what's going on here we know that you've just got to go out and and um try to sort of deal with this situation um don't worry about saying anything we're just going to pray for you and they did now i can't remember what they prayed and i can't actually remember what subsequently uh i said when when i went out for the the second half what i can remember is that in that moment this mysterious sense of peace that is beyond all understanding came beyond me it came upon me and whilst i can't remember what those words were i do remember that i was given the words to say and the witches shut up i told you it was a weird story but i share it with you because i think it's important to understand that whilst that situation probably doesn't happen most days of our lives plenty of other situations do where we face uncertainty and stress and anxiety we think what earth is going to happen i feel totally out of my depth in this situation i don't know what i'm going to do i don't know what i'm going to do and we need to be reminded in those situations and hold close to this promise that those battles that we face when we trust in jesus are not ours they're his now that doesn't mean to say that we step back in some passive recipient way and do nothing the very opposite but it does mean a letting go of control in a way that perhaps is much easier to say than it is to do but nevertheless is something that we need to do that's the first thing the second thing that i think we can learn from this story is to take note of the way that in this situation where these people were suddenly surrounded by armies threatening to wipe them out they sought out the lord immediately it was the first thing they did now that's important because it generally tends to be the last thing that we do prayer we tend to think of as the last resort rather than the first one a few years ago um before we had children uh tamara and i were going on holiday uh to a place that we needed to go and have some we need to have some vaccinations before we went and um tamara used to

kind of by the way before i go on before i continue let me just reassure you in case you're feeling uncomfortable about this i have her full permission to share this story we had the conversation a few weeks ago remember yeah she's shaking her head all right tamara used to have a problem with with with injections and with needles for for many years but then three children later and lots of vaccinations and uh and blood tests and things uh no more but but but but this these days back in those days this was it was a thing and we sort of uh tamara would faint when uh at the side of a needle or when when an injection was about to happen and so we went to the the the the gp to to have our our vaccinations and um we explained um i explained the situation this is why i'm here in case in case she happens to faint and uh he kind of looked a little bit blank but said no so seriously she needs to lie down while this happens and um and i'll just be here in the room so he said fair enough so he went on and gave the injections and sure enough tamara fainted for a very long time in fact it was a really long time and the doctor was there talking to her and it felt like a really really really long time uh and uh and he was sort of waiting for her to come around and then sort of turned around to me and i i said what can i do anything and he said with a really serious look on his face pray now when your doctor tells you that you need to start praying you really really worry now absolutely everything was fine uh but the point is is that most of the time prayer is regarded as something that you actually only turn to when you've absolutely exhausted all the other options it's the last resort this passage tells us that in fact if we're to take ownership of faith and to let go and to let god prayer is the first place we need to go to which is also the last and everything else in between but it's our first resort and not our last resort and the last thing that we can pick up from this story is that we need to know what happens when they go out and they face these vast vast armies that are threatening to kill because we read how they position their own armies you would think that they would put their strongest and their biggest and their best soldiers on the front line but they don't in fact they don't put any soldiers on the front line at all what they choose to do is set their worship leaders on the front line how about that the singers go in front singing give thanks to the lord for his love endures forever what we've got there is a picture of what it is to go into our daily battles when we put worship first when we put prayer first we don't understand what's going to happen to us but we can be reassured that we go there with god first and that's his promise that though we do know what is going to happen he's there and he will fight those battles we do not know what to do but our eyes are on you let's fix our eyes onto jesus

let's do that in prayer now if you can ask the music team perhaps to come to lead us in a moment let's take a few moments as we come before god in prayer and as we perhaps think of whatever battles we may be facing whatever that might look like whatever it is whatever it means whatever situations that we're facing over the coming days or weeks or months or maybe they're longer term things hold these before god in prayer now we ask that he would give us that deeper reassurance that those battles are not ours to face they are in his hands lord god we thank you that you are always so much bigger and greater than any battle that we may face forgive us for those times when prayer and worship becomes the point of last resort rather than the first place that we go lord as we face whatever pressures or fears that we have in our daily lives so we ask that you would station your heavenly armies around us keep our eyes focused on you help us to trust you and to know that the battle belongs to you and to dare to give thanks in advance so lord we thank you that you are sovereign we thank you that you know our future even when we don't help us to trust help us to focus our hearts not on the battles but upon you amen amen

[18 : 41] Amen.