



NAC-USA
DEVELOPMENT
INSTITUTE

Thankful for
the Rewards
of God

Thankful for
Our Future

MIDWEEK SCRIPT

Thankful for
the Promise
of Christ

2016

November

Session 1 – Thankful for the Rewards of God

Welcome to the first midweek session for the month of November. During this month we celebrate Thanksgiving in both our congregations and our country, which makes it only right that our focus this month will be on giving thanks! What does it mean to “give thanks”? So often we are taught or teach others that we should be grateful for what we have. This is one way to understand thankfulness, and it is very important. This month we want to contemplate giving thanks specifically for what our God has promised to those who love Him and answer His call—our promised future. By giving thanks for **what hasn't even happened yet**, we also show our love and trust in the Almighty God. With such an attitude in our hearts, families, and congregations, we will find an increased fellowship and desire to love and serve each other. The next three small group topics will be:

- Thankful for the Rewards of God
- Thankful for Our Future, and
- Thankful for the Promise of Christ

Our topic for today is, “Thankful for the Rewards of God,” and we will focus on the parable of the Lord Jesus found in Matthew 20:1-15, known as “The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard.” This parable is an answer to the disciples’ question as to what their reward will be for following Him (Matthew 19:27). Jesus responds to the question in Matthew 19:28, where He promises the disciples that they will sit on the throne of His glory and join the Son of Man in His future activity. The parable that follows then deals with the freedom of God’s grace, which He can bestow on every human being. The point here is that no one can earn salvation; we are dependent on the grace of God.

In “The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard,” Jesus outlines in a few words that the landowner treated all the day laborers he hired for his vineyard the same way and, surprisingly, even paid them the same wages despite the difference in the number of hours they had worked. Those who had spent many hours working in the vineyard complained that this was unfair. But Jesus explained that the landowner was fair; he did what he said he would do. On the contrary, he was being quite generous. From this, we can deduce two truths: no one can rely on his own accomplishments and no one can demand a reward from God other than the one He wants to give.

That means that we have to conform to the will of the Lord and work in the vineyard, to be faithful, to model our lives on the gospel, and to testify of it in word and deed. Then we will receive the reward: eternal life with God (Matthew 19:29). What does this mean in concrete terms? The first church modeled these principles that are still important today.

- We follow the call of God and model our lives on the gospel, which means that we love God and our neighbor and prepare for the return of Christ.
- We help along in the vineyard— in the church of Christ and our own congregation— and testify of the gospel of the death, resurrection, and return of Christ, and help build up our own congregation.
- We put Christ at the center of our lives. This requires that we decide for the Lord every day anew. This calls for a repentant heart and the willingness to follow the apostles. The apostles have been given the commission to baptize with water and the Holy Spirit, to teach the gospel for today, and prepare the bride for Christ’s return.

The parable makes clear that the reward—the full and indissoluble fellowship with God in the new creation—will be the same for all. Ponder this for a moment. **The reward is so great; it is priceless and eternal.** It is worth achieving no matter the price. Even the Bride of Christ will not receive greater salvation than those who will come to believe in the thousand-year kingdom of peace. In the new creation God will be “all in all” (1 Corinthians 15:28). Out of love, we need to trust in the righteousness of God and set aside our concerns about fairness.

We aspire to fellowship with God not only because we have been promised a glorious future, but also because we can feel His love already now and want to be with Him forever. This being the case, we will also be able to know the purpose that God has for us and will be able to better cope with the troubles and burdens of life. The workers in the vineyard were just working for a wage, but we have a much stronger incentive. Our driving motivation is our love for Christ, and our goal is to be with Him forever. Thus, our reward is actually priceless: to be eternally with the Lord in His glory!

I'd like to share with you an example of a man who was truly thankful for the rewards of God. He was lying in the hospital with a terminal disease. His priest came to visit him one day. This man had, within the past year, just been sealed, and he was already in his eighties. The priest and the man discussed his life and even the fact that he was only diagnosed shortly after being sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit. The man then said, "How wonderful that I now have such a promise and future. I feel the love and am served by my ministers and brothers and sisters. I have a promised future with God, the Father, and Son. I am at peace." This brother passed away a short while later, but was able to express his thankfulness for finding the way to salvation, even though he only had been granted a small amount of time on this earth to grow in faith. Our priest, being a part of the church for many years, could also share in our brother's joy.

To be eternally with our God and in His love is our great reward. Doesn't this understanding already cause us to be thankful today? When we give thanks for such a beautiful promise, we are then filled with a desire to serve others and help them also attain this same reward.

Now please turn to your discussion questions.

Session 2 – Thankful for Our Future

Welcome back. In today's session, we will be continuing our series on thankfulness in preparation for Thanksgiving and look at why we can be thankful for the future.

Typically, when we are thankful for something, it's because something good has happened to us that causes us to give thanks for it. So how can we be thankful for the future if it hasn't happened to us yet? We can start with the realization that God is with us, and **when we have Him, we already have everything**. This includes the future He has promised for those who profess and believe in Him. With God in our lives, we know the future that awaits us, and we can be thankful for it. And while sometimes thoughts of the future bring about worry or stress, we trust in the future that God will bring about because He fulfills all of His promises and is the only constant in a world that is always changing. As we experience God more and more, we build confidence in the promises of God.

We can look at some aspects of the future that John lays out in Revelation 21:3-4 as promises of God: "And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.'"

Upon first reading these verses, it seems like such a nice thought that there will be no more tears or sorrow in our future. However, these verses go much deeper than being free of pain and suffering. God's primary objective here isn't to deliver people from their cares and alleviate misery. He will address evil at its roots by resolving what occurred at man's fall into sin: separation from God. God will dwell with His people and when that occurs, things like death and sorrow will not exist anymore because our relationship with God will be restored and they will have no place in that relationship, just as they had no place in the relationship God had with Adam and Eve before the fall.

While these verses from Revelation are written in the future tense, we can understand their relevance to us today as being part of the plan of salvation. Our dwelling with God in the future is part of His plan, just as us living on this earth now, with all of our sorrows and pain, is part of His plan. Experiencing the bad in life builds our trust and dependence on God and gives us an appreciation for a future without these struggles.

And if situations in life seem to never take a turn for the better, we can look at Revelation 21:5 for comfort when God says, "Behold, I make all things new." Notice how this is written in the present tense; God is making all things new *now*. This isn't just something He is saving for the future. God is taking our present pain and sorrow and turning it into

something that can be used for His glory. It might take longer than we would like, but God works in His own time. We just need to have the patience and trust that one day, our troubles will end because God promises they will.

How do we know that God will fulfill His promises laid out in Revelation 21? Do we just have to have faith in Him? Yes, we need to have faith and trust, but we also have evidence that God fulfills His promises. This is experienced through the sending of Jesus. Already, God promised to send a Savior in Genesis 3:15 when He says He will send someone to bruise the serpent's head. We can hope in a future with no death and pain because God has established His plan of salvation and has continued to follow that plan by sending His Son, who made it possible for us to restore our relationship with Him.

The future that God has planned for us is something that we can already be thankful for now, but it is something that we have to choose. God's offer of love and grace for an eternal life with Him is not forced upon us. We have to want it, and our words and actions should reflect that desire to dwell with Him.

In the next session, we will further explore the promise of God to send a Savior and how we can be thankful for that promise that would change the entire world.

Session 3 - Thankful for the Promise of Christ

This month we've been expressing our thankfulness to God through our national and congregational celebration of Thanksgiving, and in our small groups. So far we've discussed giving thanks for God's promised rewards and thanks for the knowledge we have of what God intends for us in the future. As we close this series and transition into the season of Advent, we want to express our thankfulness to God for the promises that will be fulfilled through Jesus Christ.

A promise is a declaration made to another person with respect to the future, stating that one will do or refrain from some specified act, or that one will give some specified thing. Many view the season of Advent as a season of hope and a season of promise. As Christians, we are people of promise because we know that our God fulfills His promises, and we await the fulfillment of the promise that Jesus gave to us – the promise of eternal life (1 John 2:25). Are we growing in our expectation of Jesus' promises? Is our hope increasing?

Before Jesus' birth, God's people were clinging to the hope that they would soon receive the gift of the Messiah that had been promised by God. The book of Genesis tells us that God promised that He would send one who would bruise the serpent's head. Isaiah told the people of Israel that "indeed the Lord has proclaimed to the end of the world: 'Say to the daughter of Zion, "Surely your salvation is coming; behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him.'" Jeremiah wrote about the new covenant that God would establish with the people of Israel by putting His law in their minds and by writing it on their hearts.

These Old Testament promises were fulfilled through the arrival and life of Jesus. Through His victory over death and the grave, Jesus Christ bridged the gap of sin that separated God and mankind. He secured a way for all people to have the opportunity to have access to forgiveness and eternal life. Through Him, all of us can gain victory over sin and be prepared to enter into His Kingdom. Paul wrote the following to the Corinthians: "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so through him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God" (2 Corinthians 1:20 NIV). All of God's promises concerning Christ are true and trustworthy and give us reason to do all we do to the glory of God, so that through us, others will put their hope in Jesus.

We can also read the promises that Jesus made to His disciples in the Gospels. He promised them that He would send the Holy Spirit who would teach them all things and bring to their remembrance all things that He had said to them (John 14:26). They experienced the fulfillment of that promise on Pentecost, and from that moment on, they grew in their faith and understanding and used what they had been taught by Jesus to spread the gospel. They built up the church as a community of believers that would care for each other and extend the love of God to all people. We need to allow the Holy Spirit to teach us and help us to remember the promises. The Holy Spirit inspires us to use our gifts within

the body of Christ in unity with our fellow believers to edify our congregations. Jesus promised the apostles of old in the Great Commission that He would be with them always. We experience the fulfillment of that promise when we live our lives fully devoted to Him and His purpose, when we remain connected to the apostle ministry, and when we continually serve others. He also promised that He would go and prepare a place for His followers and return to bring them there. We await the fulfillment of that promise and it serves as our source of hope during this time of Advent.

The promises of God serve to build up and strengthen the believers so that they can profess the greatness of God through their words and actions.

When we take time to remind ourselves of what God has done and what He will do,
our trust grows,
our faith deepens and matures,
our love for God and our fellow man develops,
our desire to help others step from the darkness into the light grows, and
our forgiveness is offered freely.

When the promises of God are alive in our hearts, then our lives will be a living testimony of what God has done, is doing, and will do.

As we journey through this season of Advent, let us not forget to express our thanks to God for all He has done for us in Jesus Christ. Remember that Christmas was the fulfillment of a promise and a sign to us all that we can live our lives in full expectation that Jesus will come again.