

Count Your Blessings



Rob Pue

In these times of trouble and tribulation, with all that's happening in the world today, it's easy to succumb to a spirit of hopelessness, despair, and grief – for the deceived, lost and perishing people around us, and yes, even for ourselves. It's especially grievous when those deceived, lost and perishing are people we know and love. Perhaps even our own spouses, children and grandchildren.

We look around and see how Satan and his demons seem to be in charge of everything now, and how truth is now regarded as “hate speech,” having fallen in the streets long ago. We see how successful the enemy has become at twisting hearts and minds, and fundamentally changing our society and culture and the entire world all around us, and it's easy to become discouraged. There are so many lies, so much hatred, so many who have departed from the faith and chosen instead to follow doctrines of demons. Yes, it can become very disheartening.

But here's what I KNOW: *“God's Word is truth”* (John 17:17). And the Bible He has given us, from Genesis to Revelation is FILLED with all we need to know about the history – and the future – of this world. It is FILLED with all we need to know to live our lives as God's own children, to raise OUR children to know and love Him, and to learn to disciple others and share the Good News of the Kingdom and Jesus' redeeming work on the cross with them as well. It's also FILLED with

warnings about what NOT to do, how NOT to live in this world... as well as instruction on how to fight the spiritual battles that threaten to ensnare us every day. In short, God's Word is FILLED with everything we need to equip us to live here on this earth and to prepare us for eternity. We need no other instruction than that which He has already graciously given.

Having said that, I'd like us to consider today, just how much JOY, PRAISE, and BEAUTY we also find in God's holy Book. And though it's easy to take our eyes off of our Creator and dwell on the negative, there are virtually countless Scriptures that talk about God's goodness, His peace, the Comfort of the Holy Spirit, and especially giving thanks.

Just as WE appreciate it when our earthly children are THANKFUL to us for all we provide and do for them, our Heavenly Father wants US to be thankful to Him as well. And we have SO MUCH to be thankful FOR! You know, you cannot be discouraged or depressed AND THANKFUL for all the many blessings you've received from the Lord at the same time... it's just not possible. So I encourage you to be THANKFUL today... and every day to the One who Created us, and this amazing "habitat" called "Earth" that He designed as our temporary home.

I'm reminded of the old hymn by John Oatman, written in 1897, titled "Count Your Blessings." It goes like this:

"When upon life's billows you are tempest-tossed, when you are discouraged, thinking all is lost; Count your many blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord has done.

"Are you ever burdened with a load of care? Does the cross seem heavy you are called to bear? Count your many blessings, every doubt will fly, and you will keep singing as the days go by.

"So, amid the conflict whether great or small, do not be

discouraged, God is over all; Count your many blessings, angels will attend, Help and comfort give you, to your journey's end."

Oftentimes, when I find myself loaded down with burdens and cares, I'm not able to sleep at night, or to calm my troubled mind. So I spend time in prayer and then I begin to count MY many blessings. A word of caution here: if you DO this – (begin to count your blessings) – instead of helping you fall into peaceful sleep, oftentimes I find myself UNABLE to name all the many blessings God has so graciously given me, and I find I'm actually so filled with thankfulness and wonder and awe at what God has done for ME, I'm too excited to sleep after not very long!

I think of God's beautiful Creation – the entire universe, designed and set in motion and sustained by His mighty hand. Through a powerful telescope on a dark, starry night, I've seen with my own eyes the rings of Saturn, and other planets, close up; not to mention our own moon – created by God and placed in just the right spot to not just light our way at night but also to help sustain life on our planet.

And this beautiful, wondrous earth. I have been blessed to be able to see and enjoy more of it in my lifetime than I ever thought I would... I've been to the highest mountain peaks in North America (and played in the snow at those summits with my kids on my birthday in August) ...as well as the lowest point called "Death Valley." I've swam in both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, I've been to tropical rain forests and desolate, wind-swept deserts. I've seen the raging rivers and the awesome power of Niagara Falls. Living in Wisconsin, I've spent much time taking in the splendor of the Great Lakes. I was even blessed to pilot a steamship part-way across Lake Michigan one time.

I'm constantly amazed at God's creation. Just the sheer BEAUTY of it is beyond description. And I often wonder what

Eden must have been like, before the fall. When everything was perfect. As incredibly beautiful as our earth is today, none of us can even begin to imagine what it once was – and will one day be again – when the New Heaven and New Earth appear.



Before Adam sinned, everything was perfect. But once mankind disobeyed God and brought sin and death upon us, our earth began producing thorns and thistles. There were no thorns before that... just beauty and perfection. I think of what Christ did on that old rugged cross for those who repent and call upon His name... and how His tormentors tortured Him so cruelly before nailing Him to that Tree... they even went “the extra mile” by fashioning a crown of thorns and jamming it into His head. Think of that: THORNS... the very thing that was brought upon this earth by our own disobedience and unbelief. Those thorns were part of the curse when God cursed the ground because of OUR sin.

But now think of THIS: Jesus Christ, our Lord, REVERSED that curse and conquered sin and death for us as He wore that crown of thorns on His head! Truly, those who murdered Him knew NOT what they were doing – and Satan perhaps even thought he had “won.” But God worked even that wretchedness together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. Yes, He wore the crown of thorns – He bore the curse and He REVERSED the curse for all who will repent and turn to Him.

Yes, I’m very thankful for this beautiful world God made for us. And all the animals and birds and flowers He filled it with for our pleasure. Each one an incredibly amazing, unique creation. Some of you know I am a bird-lover; if you just look at the incredible design of BIRDS alone – the many

different ways each one is designed... some colorful and bright, "painted" with such creativity and splendor by the Master Craftsman Himself. Some with unbelievable eyesight... I'll always remember the time I was out on a lake watching in awe as a Bald Eagle soared high overhead, circling. Suddenly, he swooped down, just above the surface of the lake, and before my eyes, snatched a fish from the water and flew it home to his Eagle family for dinner! Yes, God let me see that. Amazing.

Some birds don't even fly – they swim, like penguins. But each one is beautiful, and each is designed with everything it needs to live and survive, and each is FED by the hand of God. Now think of all the other animals the Lord made; then think of the "lillies of the field!" Some designed to be our food; some just for the pure beauty of seeing them, because God LIKED them!

And I have to wonder, looking around JUST AT CREATION, how anyone could ever even question the fact that there is a God in heaven who made all this. Romans 1 tells us, "*the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead...*" Yes, those who doubt God are indeed, without excuse.

The human body is also a miracle of Creation. There is nothing else like it, designed for our souls to live in on this earth, but also blessed with the senses of sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste. Did you ever consider God did not HAVE to give us all these things? But He wanted us to be able to experience ALL these wondrous aspects of His creation – and in the New Heaven and New Earth, I can only imagine the wonders He has in store for our new, restored bodies!

Then, think of the changing seasons. The warmth and beauty of summer. The spectacular colors and crispness in the air at

harvest time. The restoration time when the world sleeps during the winter, and then the rebirth that comes in the spring.

If you look around, you'll see there is such BEAUTY and MAGNIFICENCE in this world that God provided for our earthly home. It's hard to believe there are so many who continue to hate Him, deny Him, persecute those who love Him and seek to destroy all that is beautiful, lovely, and good.

Yes, there is great beauty, but also great ugliness. One side, you have the things of God and His incredible creation, His amazing design for mankind. You have the natural family, one man and one woman, designed to be united for life in holy matrimony, a covenant union, producing beautiful babies that we are to nurture, train up and teach all we know about our Heavenly Father, teaching THEM to honor and revere their Lord too. On the other side you have darkness, evil schemes, greed, lies, deceit, treachery, sorcery, demonism, hedonism, and death. Spiritual warfare continues and daily we are to put on the armor of God that we might stand firm in our faith and resist the wiles and temptations of the enemy.

And again, the work of spiritual warfare – which we are ALL, as Christians, CALLED to engage in, serving as a restraining force against evil in this world – is much easier for us when we count our blessings and remain THANKFUL to God for each one. Psalm 95:2, *“Let us come into His presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to Him with songs of praise!”* Psalm 106 and 107 both begin with the same words: *“Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. His steadfast love endures forever.”* And in case you didn't catch the gist of those Scriptures, look at all of Psalm 136!

Philippians 4:4, *“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice!”* And we all know Philippians 4:6 and 7, *“Do not be anxious about anything but in everything, by prayer and*

supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God, and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

And continuing on in Philippians, in Verse 8: *"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."*

We have so much to be thankful for. Yes, the world around us may be dark and growing darker every day. We may very well be at the closing end of days here on this earth, and we may be precariously perched on the precipice of the Great Tribulation, when the wrath of God is unleashed on all those who hate Him. But while we are still here, while we still have breath in our lungs, there is still good work for us to do. And our job is to BE His Church, to BE the salt and light of the world, to serve as His restraining force against the evil of the enemy, to preach the Gospel and make disciples, and to ALWAYS be thankful to our Creator and Sustainer and to praise Him in all circumstances. There is no greater calling and no greater purpose.

When the enemy of our souls has you discouraged and depressed – again, simply begin to count your blessings and name them, one by one. Thank the Lord for all He's given you, and then with a grateful heart for the privilege of serving your King, pick yourself up, dust yourself off and get back to work. Use your talents wisely, because there comes a day, perhaps soon, when no man will be able to work; so let us be about His business as good stewards of the faith and press on, rejoicing always and thanking God for His abundant love and grace toward us. Let there never be found among us any hint of grumbling or murmuring or ungratefulness. Our Lord has made us His own children, and we've been blessed beyond all measure. Thank

Him, every day, and let's do EVERYTHING we do as service unto our Lord. I pray you and your loved ones will have a blessed and happy time of Thanksgiving this year – not just for a day, but every day, as you work to minister to and serve all those around you.

Audio CDs and transcripts of this message are available when you call me at Wisconsin Christian News, (715) 486-8066. Or email Rob@WisconsinChristianNews.com and ask for message number 270.

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E-Mail Rob Pue: Rob@WisconsinChristianNews.com