Have a Spiritually Blessed Thanksgiving
Ephesians 1:13–14

In the old Broadway musical, the song goes: “Oh Calcutta, I want to see more of you.”

I am not so sure the producers of that play had ever been to Calcutta. This city of 10 million people has been called “the black hole of civilization.” It has been described by one author as “the greatest urban disaster in the world.” The city is one public latrine with bulls, cows, goats, dogs, and humans defecating in the streets. Exhaust-belching busses, taxis, and trucks make Calcutta an asthmatic nightmare. Everything is black with soot. Buildings and foliage are covered with it. The soot is so thick in the air that when you clean out your ears the ear wax is black.

At the same time, Calcutta is the most fascinating place I’ve been. Their way of life is something unknown to us in America. Daily you can witness families bathing, washing clothes, shaving and urinating in the streets. You go to the local meat markets and watch them kill a goat, skin a goat and hang the meat while flies and birds swarm around. (I immediately became a vegetarian.) You can meet a bull head-on and watch a herd of goats go by your hotel window early in the morning.

One day you might find a person totally nude sitting in the street; the next day you might find a dead body lying in the street. Beggars, owned by the mafia, sit in the middle of busy intersections with arms or legs decapitated, only to have whatever money they get taken from them by their owners. Many families are so poor that when a loved one dies they cannot afford a burial. To be cremated cost about $5.00 in U.S. money and many cannot afford that. So the family tosses their body into the Ganges River where it sinks to the bottom.

The city is named after a Hindu god, Kali, who in the Hindu pantheon is revered as a mother figure, the giver of life, as well as the destroyer of evil. She is depicted as having many arms and weapons and wearing human skulls and
bones. Blood sacrifices, traditionally black goats, are part of a ceremony of worship. The blood of the sacrifice represents the life force that Kali can bestow or take.

Worshippers come to the temple bringing their offerings of flowers, turnips, radishes, alcohol, and so on. One by one they would place their head in a wooden yoke-like altar stained with blood from previous sacrifices. The worshippers would touch the blood from the altar, dab it on their forehead and chest and then present their offerings. They would leave feeling they had been given new life and that evil would not come upon them. All this power they believe will come to them is from a goddess statue, made from man's hands, an idol that cannot speak, nor hear, nor see, nor move.

The thought that most came to my mind during my two-week stay was, “This is the most hopeless place I have ever been.”

Then came Sunday morning. Our team attended a large Assembly of God Church where over 3000 worshippers gathered. They praised the true and living God. The worship was incredible. Tears rolled down my cheeks as the crowd with arms lifted high sang: I Worship You Almighty God, Hallelujah, The Lord Reigns, All Hail King Jesus, Worthy You Are Worthy, Majesty, and then the song that really got to my heart, To Him Who Sits on the Throne.

I stood singing with a broken voice asking myself, “How can they sing these songs?” To walk outside the church building one would be hard pressed to find the Sovereign God sitting on His throne. But in the hearts of those Indian worshippers, who knew the true God, He was, and still is on the throne.

How could they worship with such faith and sincerity? They were thankful for the spiritual blessings that God gives.

Be Claiming God’s Blessings

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3).

By recognizing what God thinks of you... Paul labels the blessings of God as spiritual in contrast to material. In the Greek, there are two different words translated “blessed.” One means “happy” or “prosperous” (makarizo). That is the
word Jesus used when He gave the beatitudes. The other word means “to speak well of” or “reputation” (eulogeo). That is the word Paul uses in our text.

What a concept! It is because of what Jesus did for us that God can speak well of us; that God is able to praise and to extol us! We have been taught the need to praise God, but have we ever considered the idea that God would praise us and honor us and hold us in the highest esteem?

*Be realizing the power of respect...* So many people today have a hard time respecting themselves. They find themselves having more in common with Rodney Dangerfield, who made a living putting himself down. One of Dangerfield’s lines was: “My dog went to the door. I thought he wanted out. I went to the door to let him out. He didn’t go out. He wanted me to go out. I get no respect even from my dog.” Groucho Marx, the vaudeville comedian used to say, “I wouldn’t join any club that would have me as a member.”

All of us like to be recognized. We like to feel important. There is a pipe organ at the Pacific Ocean Studios in San Francisco called “The Chamberlain Music Master.” If you get down in the dumps and feel like no one appreciates you, you can go to the Studio, push a special button on the organ and get an immediate round of applause. I mean concert-hall-size applause. Play Chopsticks on it and the organ will give you a virtual standing ovation.

Sometimes you may feel the need of pushing that special button. However, there is something far better. When you feel no one cares for you read the first chapter of Ephesians. It will tell you that you have been blessed with every spiritual blessing, which means God is applauding you, that God is respecting you.

Before we look into this chapter, let me remind you of how important it is to show respect to others. Author Charles Kingsley wrote: “Never hurt anyone’s self respect. Never trample on any soul, though it may be lying in the veriest myre, for that spark of self respect is its only hope, it’s only chance, the last seed of a better life, the voice of God which still whispers to it. You are not what you ought to be, but you are still God’s child, still an immortal soul; you may rise yet, and conquer yet, and be a man yet, after the likeness of God who made you, and of Christ who died for you. Oh, why crush that voice in any heart? If you do, the poor creature is lost, and lies where he or she falls and never tries to rise again.”

People’s self-respect is important for it is who they are! If you hurt someone and cause them to lose their self-respect, apologize. Act nobly and make no excuses!
In his book *Everyone’s a Coach*, Ken Blanchard tells of Don Shula, former head football coach of the Miami Dolphins. He lost his temper near an open microphone during a televised game with the Los Angeles Rams. Millions of viewers were surprised and shocked by Shula’s explicit profanity. Letters soon arrived all over the country, voicing the disappointment of many who had respected the coach for his integrity. Shula could have given excuses, but he didn’t. Everyone who included a return address received a personal apology. He closed each letter by stating: “I value your respect and will do my best to earn it again.”

As Christians, we need to value and respect God by how we speak and by how we act. If anyone in this world has a right to feel honored, it’s those of us who believe; it’s those of us who have been blessed with spiritual blessings. God respects you! God honors you! God praises you! Is that is not a reason to be thankful? Is that not a reason to lift up your head, put a spring in your step and demonstrate by life and by lip that we are truly grateful for such mercy He has bestowed upon us?

There is no greater honor that we can receive than to be respected by God. Somehow, I have to think that those Indians of Calcutta who went to that church, raised their hands in praise and sang, “To Him who Sits on the Throne,” did so because they knew that the One who sits on the throne respects them! Thank Him this Thanksgiving season for the spiritual blessing of God’s respect for you!

**Be Counting Your Blessings**

There are seven ways that God shows His respect for you:

*He receives you by choice*... “He has chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love...” (1:4). Before God created the heavens and the earth, God knew you. He knew every choice you would make, and because you chose Him through Christ, He has chosen you!

All of us like to be chosen. When I was a youngster, I liked to play “Over the Line.” It’s a form of baseball. Captains would be selected who would choose their team. Sometimes I got to be captain, but when I wasn’t I wanted to be the first to be chosen. There is that satisfaction of being first. That meant of the kids wanting to play, I was considered the best.
The thing about God choosing us is, He sees all of us as best! He has cleansed us through the blood of Christ and declared us to be holy and blameless before Him. Practically speaking we are not holy nor blameless. We still live in the flesh. We still sin. Yet the moment we sin, it is already forgiven because we are declared justified before God! This is our positional standing before Him. To make this more personal: it is because I am in Christ that He views me just as if I’d never sinned at all. That is why Paul could say, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).

What greater reason to be thankful this Thanksgiving season than to know God has chosen you and has declared you to be holy and blameless before Him in love! Amen!

*He recognizes you as His child... “...having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself...” (1:5). God has adopted us into His family. He has taken us “from the domain of darkness and delivered us into the kingdom of the Son of His love” (Colossians 1:13). Just think, you can call to God and refer to Him as “Father.” We can even be more personal with God and call Him “Abba Father” (Romans 8:15), meaning “Daddy God.” There is no longer any distance between you and your Creator. You now have an intimate relationship with!*

What greater reason to be thankful than to know you are God’s adopted child and you can call Him “Daddy God.”

*He redeemed you through the blood of Jesus... “In Him we have redemption through His blood...” (1:7a). To be redeemed means “to buy back by paying a price.” In order for God to adopt us from Satan’s domain, a ransom price had to be paid. That price was the very life and blood of His Son Jesus Christ. If there is anything that tells you that God loves you, that is it!*

What greater reason to be thankful than to know you have been redeemed!

*He has removed all your sins... “...the forgiveness of sins...” (1:7b). How far did He remove them? Listen to David: “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:12). And where does he bury them? Micah says: “You will cast all our sins in the depth of the sea” (Micah 7:19). The writer of Hebrews tells us that God is merciful and “your sins and your lawless deeds I will remember no more” (Hebrews 8:12).*
What greater reason to be thankful than to know you have been forgiven and all your sins have been cast into the depths of the sea where they will be remembered no more!

*He revealed to you the mystery of His will*... “...having made known to us the mystery of His will...” (1:9). God had a plan for the world that He kept secret until Christ came and arose from the dead. The mystery is that Jews and Gentiles will become as one in the body, His Church, with Christ as the head. God came first to the Jew, but the Jews rejected Him. This opened the door for the Gentiles to become part of God’s eternal plan.

Paul spoke of this mystery in writing to the Romans: “For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, “as it is written: ‘The deliverer will come out of Zion, and He shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins’” (Romans 11:25–27). When the Jews rejected their Messiah, God brought a partial blindness on the Jews and turned His attention to the Gentiles to do what the Jews refused to do. They were to reveal the Messiah to the world. So God turned to the Gentiles and when the full number of Gentiles are saved, He will again turn to the Jews for He made a covenant with them that is irrevocable, “For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Romans 11:29).

In Ephesians 3, Paul again made mention of this “mystery... which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Holy Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel...” (Ephesians 3:4–6).

What greater reason to be thankful than to know that God did not forsake us Gentiles. While we were not His first choice to reveal Himself to the world, nonetheless we became God’s final choice, and the day will come when there will be no distinction between Jews and Gentiles, as we will be one in Christ.

*He rewards you with an inheritance*... “In Him we have also obtained an inheritance...” (1.11). If God is our Father and we are His children, then we have a right to an inheritance. What is our inheritance? Paul wrote to the Romans: “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if
children then heirs — heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ…” (Romans 8:16–17a).

Our inheritance from the Father is no different than what Jesus, the Son of God, receives as His inheritance. We are joint heirs with Christ. Talk about respect! Talk about honor! What is the Son’s inheritance? David tells us in Psalm 2, a Messianic psalm: “I will declare the decree: the LORD has said to Me, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give you the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession” (Psalm 2:7–8).

When Christ returns to earth with His saints, the Father will give to Christ and His Church the nations of the world over which to rule. He will rule with a rod of iron. The Church along with Christ will make this world the kind of world that God intended to be when He created it in the first place. It will be another Garden of Eden with the nations living together in a world of peace. It will be a world where truth, righteousness, and justice prevail. All progressive political correctness will be a relic of the old earth. You and I will have a part in this plan of God for we will be recipients of this marvelous inheritance from our heavenly Father.

What greater reason to be thankful than to know as children of God we are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, and we will assist Him in ruling and reigning over a new earth that God will renovate upon Christ’s coming to earth. Don’t forget we come along for the ride! Sounds exciting, doesn’t it? Then let’s thank Him in advance!

He relieves all your insecurities... “…you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession…” (1:13b–14). Every spiritual blessing comes with His “guarantee.” He has sealed us with the Holy Spirit of promise. The idea of sealing implies ownership. In ancient times kings had a signet ring. When they wanted to make a matter official, they would put the ring in some wax, press it on a document which would leave a likeness of its own impression. The document was sealed with the ring of the king. It was a sign that he takes ownership of that document and will fulfill all the conditions contained therein.

God has placed His seal on you in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He is God’s guarantees that the best is yet to come. The Holy Spirit in you is God saying to you, “Now you are Mine! I’ve got you! Satan will never own you again! Every single blessing I have promised is yours.”
There is no need to doubt your salvation — ever! He has chosen you, He has adopted you as His child, He has redeemed you by the blood of Christ, He has removed all your sins, He has revealed to you the mystery of His will, He has rewarded you with His inheritance, and He has relieved you of all insecurities.

What greater reason to be thankful than to know that we are secure in Christ and that “the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Romans 11:29).

Be Celebrating God’s Blessings

By recognizing His Person... These spiritual blessings from God are based on three things:

1. *Seen in the riches of His grace* (1:7b)... There is nothing we can do to deserve what He has done for us! These are God’s gifts to us through His Son. He paid the price so we don’t have to! So enjoy and celebrate your standing before God!

2. *Seen in the rewarding of His purpose*... He gives these blessings “according to the good pleasure of His will” (1:5b, 9b). When God gives us these blessings it gives Him great joy!

3. *Seen in the recognition of His will*... “…according to the counsel of His will…” (1:11b). Why does God give us these blessings? It is because He wants to!

What have we learned about the Personhood of God? He gives spiritual blessings to all who believe in Him and in His Son out of His grace, according to His will. And for His good pleasure!

*By responding with praise*... Three times in Ephesians 1, Paul writes: “to the praise of His glory” (1:6, 12, 14). God deserves our praise! In America, we have been so blessed with material goods that it ought to make us grateful. Instead, we have become a nation of greed, selfishness, and ingratitude. We live in our big houses with three-car garages; we stash our refrigerators and freezers with food that can last for weeks; we channel surf because we do not know which of the 200 programs on cable we want to watch. When we compare ourselves with the average person in India—or any third world country—we are spoiled rotten.
I wonder if all these material blessings we have has blinded us to our spiritual blessings. Yet, it is the spiritual blessings that brought 3,000 Indians from Calcutta to an Assembly of God Church on a Sunday morning to sing: *To Him Who Sits on the Throne, I Worship You Almighty God, The Lord Reigns.*

At this Thanksgiving season, may you be thankful for more than the material things you possess, including your health and family. Be also thankful for His spiritual blessings, which tell you that God respects you! Amen!