

ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

Pastor Rick Warren

Dec. 1, 2001

One verse I want us to look at this morning. John 3:16. We've had Thanksgiving this week and in the spirit of Thanksgiving we've focused on things we're grateful for. What I'd like to do just to start off today, if you'd turn to the people on either side of you and say, "Thank you for sitting by me." All I'm trying to do is just warm this place up a little bit. We're the church you burn up in the summer and you freeze in the winter. I'm amazed that you keep coming back!

Doctors say the healthiest emotion you can have is gratitude. It's the absolutely healthiest emotion you can have. The attitude of gratitude. In fact the more you work on this attitude of being grateful, the healthier you'll be. That's what doctors tell us.

But there's an enemy of gratitude. There's an enemy of thankfulness. There's an enemy that keeps us from being grateful for what we do have. It's guilt. Guilt and gratitude do not go together in the same body. It's hard for me to feel grateful when I feel guilty.

Guilt is man's oldest problem. It doesn't matter what culture you live in, where you're from, who you are, what your background is. All of us have experienced guilt at different times in our lives. I think it was Earnest Jones who said, "Man's basic problem [most fundamental problem] is the need to overcome guilt."

It's been said that in order for you to have emotional and psychological stability you've got to know how to deal with guilt. You've got to know how to release it, how to let go of it. If you don't we take it out on ourselves in all kinds of symptoms. You can see it all over society. The rise in tranquilizers to mask guilt. A lot of people drive themselves out of guilt. They're busy. They're frantically busy and they get up in the morning and they rush all through life, come home, flop into bed late at night hoping they'll fall asleep before those feelings of guilt come in on them.

How do you deal with that kind of thing? Why do we feel guilty? What causes guilt?

The Bible says that God has made in each person a conscious. That's what makes us different from animals. We have the freedom to choose right and wrong. God gives us that freedom. He makes us like Himself in that way. We have the freedom to choose. When we make the wrong choices there's a little light that goes off in our mind that says "Tilt!" On the outside we may say, "It's no big deal! Everybody else is doing it. It's no problem. You make your own rules. There are no absolutes," and all these other kinds of rationalizing. You've heard me say before that *rationalizing* is just *rational lies*.

Rationalizing is trying to convince with your mind what your heart knows is wrong. So no matter what society says about things when we violate an inborn conscious God has put in us we feel guilty.

Have you ever ran through a red light and look around real quickly? "Whew! I didn't get caught!" That's your conscious talking.

ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

Nobody else talks to you but your conscious talks to you. So as a result we pour guilt onto our lives. That's the basic problem. You can't be happy, you can't be grateful with guilt. Guilt makes you miserable. It destroys your confidence. It can make you sick. It can make you fearful, paranoid.

You remember me telling the story. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the guy who wrote Sherlock Holmes, all those novels, one day he decided to pull a prank. He wrote a note, an anonymous note to twelve prominent Englishmen. All the note said, "All is found out. Flee at once." Within twenty-four hours eight of them had left the country. Everybody's got their skeletons.

Guilt makes you miserable. It pulls you down. You can't be grateful and guilty at the same time. So how do you deal with it?

John 3:16-17 *"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through Him."* That's God's antidote to guilt.

This is the most famous verse in the Bible. Many of you already know this verse. In the New International Version there are 27 words in John 3:16. The middle word, the fourteenth word, is the word "Son." The first half of the verse is all about God. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten..." Son is right in the middle. The second half of the verse is all about man: "That whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life." That in itself is a picture. God is on one side, man is on the other side. And Jesus Christ is between them to bring them together. How? To get rid of your guilt.

God didn't come into the world to condemn the world [to make you feel guilty] God came to save you. It says that God so loved the world. What does that mean "so loved?" That's the cause of forgiveness. God so loved the world.

During World War II there was a man who went around and he got 300,000 little mirrors. On the back of them he wrote John 3:16 and said, "If you want to see who God loves turn this over." If nobody else had ever been born, but you'd been born and you'd sinned and you needed to be forgiven, Jesus Christ still would have come to the cross and died for you if you were the only one. Why? Because He *so loves* you.

People say, Why in the world was I made? Why am I here on earth? You're here because the Bible says God made you to love you. Did you know that? God made you as an object to be loved. The Bible says God is love. It doesn't say He has love. It says, *"God is love."* God is love. Love is worthless unless you bestow it on some object or thing or person. The Bible says that you were created as an object of God's love. He made you just to love you.

But the Bible says that all of us at times in our lives have rejected that love. We've said, I'm going to do my own thing. I'm going to be my own boss. I'm going to run my own life. I, I, I, I, I! The middle letter of sin is what? *I*. That's the whole root. I'm going to be my own boss. I'm going to do my own thing. As a result, when we do that, that little light in our mind that God planted in there called our conscious goes off "Tilt!" When we break God's rules, when we don't go the way He wants us to go it causes us to feel guilty and it causes separation from God.

ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

The Bible says that whenever you break a law you've got to pay the penalty for it. If I speed, I get a speeding ticket, I pay the penalty. If you shoplift, you pay the penalty and go to jail. You break man's laws you pay man's penalties. When you break God's laws you pay God's penalty. The Bible says, "*The wages of sin is death.*" Obviously everybody must sin because everybody dies. Have you figured that one out? The mortality rate is one hundred percent! It's contagious. The wages of sin is death. That's the bad news.

But the good news in the rest of the verse says "*But the gift of God is eternal life.*" God says I have come to earth to pay the penalty for your sins. That's what we're going to talk about today as we take the Lord's Supper in gratitude, in thanksgiving.

One of the words that the Lord's Supper is called in the Bible in the Greek is *Eucharist*. It means, "given with thanks." I think it's appropriate at Thanksgiving time to thank God for what He's done for us. The Bible says that when I come to Christ and I accept what He's done on the cross He does three things to my sin.

The Bible says that first He takes it and He puts it out of sight. The Bible says that as far as east is from the west my sin is separated from me. When I come to Christ and say "God, I admit that I've done wrong. I ask You to forgive me. Come into my life. I want to accept what You've done for me." He takes it and He puts all of our sins behind His back, the Bible says. Out of sight.

The Bible says that He takes all the guilt that you've got and He puts it out of mind. The Bible says He puts it out of memory. The Bible says, "*Your sin will I remember no more.*" Isn't that amazing? The Bible says that God forgets. The God who made this whole world can forget something. You know what He forgets? He forgets your sin the moment you ask God in Jesus Christ to forgive you. He forgives and not only forgives, He forgets. The Bible says that He takes the sin and throws them in the deepest part of the ocean and puts up a "No fishing" sign. He doesn't want you dragging the out again.

The problem is that many of you have accepted the forgiveness of Jesus Christ for your sin, for the things you've done wrong, but you haven't learned to forgive yourself. Today as we take Communion, as we take the Lord's Supper, I want you to remember that when Jesus Christ died on the cross He paid for every wrong thing. Not just every wrong thing you've already done. But did you know that Jesus Christ when He died on the cross paid for every sin you're going to commit tomorrow and next week and next year and the rest of your life. Forgiven. God takes it and gives us forgiveness. He does it without us having to bargain. "God, if You'll forgive me I'll never do it again." We don't bribe God. We don't say "God, if You'll forgive me I'll tithe thirty percent." He just gives it unconditionally. That is what the Lord's Supper is to remind us of.

If you go to Washington D.C. you find memorials all over the place. People have built memorials – the Jefferson Memorial, the Lincoln Memorial, the Washington Memorial, the Vietnam Memorial, the Martin Luther King Memorial and on and on and on. For years all around the world human beings have built memorials to themselves. The pyramids were memorials that kings built to themselves. Over in India there's the Taj Mahal. It took 20,000 laborers to build the Taj Mahal years and years, just a memorial to one man.

ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

It's interesting to me that Jesus Christ never left a building. He never left a monument to Himself. What He did leave was an act, a ceremony, a memorial. He said, "*Do this to remember Me.*" Periodically we need to remember what good news it really is. That I can be forgiven because of what Jesus Christ did on the cross.

Most people do not realize the torture that Christ went through even before He went to the cross. The Bible says that before Jesus Christ went to the cross He went through six trials. Six trials. Three of them Roman, three of them Jewish – all of them illegal. From one to the next. Being accused by false accusers. Nobody had any facts on Him because He'd lived sinlessly.

The Bible says that after He had gone through those trials it says that they took Him and they blindfolded Him and they let the Roman soldiers have their day with Him. Make fun of Him. The Bible says that they beat Him and they spit on Him. They pulled out His beard and they put a crown of thorns on His head long before He went to the cross.

The Bible says that Jesus Christ was scourged before He went to the cross. Scourging was a whip that the Romans had made with a cat-of-nine-tails on it – nine strips of leather at the end. In those strips of leather were tied bits of bone and glass and sharp rock. They would strip a person naked and then they would whip them with that scourging. Every time they pull it away it'd just pull up the flesh of the person.

The Bible says that Jesus Christ was scourged thirty nine times. Before He went to the cross! His back was one mass of pulp of flesh that had been torn even before He went to the cross. Why did they quit at thirty-nine times? Because there was a law that said you could only do forty maximum because forty would usually kill a person. If you did more than forty – miscounted – then the person who had done the scourging could be scourged himself. So what they would always do is they would do one less than forty just in case they miscounted.

When Jesus was scourged, His back was just a mess even before He went to the cross. Then in that weakened condition with the loss of blood they gave Him this heavy cross which He had to carry Himself. Carry up the hill to Calvary.

Then they would lay the cross out and they would stretch the person's hands out and they would nail his hands to the cross. They weren't these little galvanized finishing nails that we use today. They were really more like spikes. They would pound them into the cross and then they would take that cross and they would lift it up and set it into the hole in the ground.

I doubt if any of you have been in this position before. But when you are extended in this position eventually the muscles around your chest cavity begin to paralyze simply from the strain on it. In this position eventually you can breathe in but you can't breathe out. The death on the cross would have been a death of suffocation if it hadn't been that Romans ingeniously devised a plan to keep you from dying that quickly.

So instead of just hanging on the cross where the muscles – the pectoralis major and all these other muscles – would eventually paralyze and you'd suffocate to death. What they did is they would bend a person's knees just a little bit and nail the feet to the cross. So that after a while a person would breathe in until he could no longer stand the pain. In order to breathe out he would stand up on his feet that were nailed to the cross. Then he would stay in that position until the pain in his feet began to be unbearable and he would let himself down again.

ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

The death on the cross was this up and down and up and down and often it took *days* before a person would die. It was the cruelest form of torture a person could think of at that time.

But the Bible tells us how Jesus Christ died. It tells us that after He had died a Roman centurion came and stuck a spear in His side. It said that when they stuck the spear into His side that water and blood came out at the same time. Water mingled with blood. Surgeons tell us that the only way that water and blood are going to enter the chest cavity together is if the heart literally explodes.

You can call it whatever you want but the fact is Jesus Christ died of a broken heart. It literally exploded. Every drop of blood that fell on the ground was saying, "I love you! I love you! I love you! I love you! I love you!" Even in His pain He took time to remember us when He said, "*Father, forgive them for they don't know what they're doing.*" They don't know!

If you say that isn't love you don't know what you're talking about. The Bible says that even in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before, Jesus Christ went into prayer because He knew what was coming. As He prayed, the Bible says, He said, "*Father, if it is possible let this cup pass from Me.*" In other words if there is any other way that the world can be saved let's do it. In the New Testament the word "cup" represents suffering. I think symbolically when Jesus Christ looked into this cup He saw every sin that had ever been committed – what the Nazis did to the Jews, babies bombed in Hiroshima, rapes, murders, adulteries – every sin ever committed. He looked into that cup and He said, God if there's any other way that the world can be saved except Me taking this sin on My life, let it be possible.

Exodus 34:7 God says, "*I will by no means clear the guilty,*" unless there's been some kind of payment. I think Jesus Christ looked into that cup and said, "Father if there's any way that Rick Warren can be saved, any other way, let it be possible. But if not, Thy will be done."

The Bible says that Jesus Christ went to the cross and died for me and He died for you. The Bible says that when He took the sin of the world on His life that even God the Father looked away and Jesus cried out "*My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?*" And God the Father looked down and said, "Son, because You've got the sins of the world on You right now. Rick Warren's and everybody else's sin. I've said in Exodus 34:7 I will by no means clear the guilty. Not even You!"

If you don't think that's love, you don't know what you're talking about.

Jesus cried out on the cross "*It is finished!*" He didn't say, "I'm finished," because He wasn't finished. It is finished. What? Salvation. The plan. Everything's been paid for. The word in Greek "It is finished," is one word *tetelestai*. It's a legal document term. It means, "Paid in full." They'd stamp it on bills that had been paid. Paid in full! *Tetelestai*. They'd stamp it on prison sentences that had been commuted. Paid in full.

The Bible says that Jesus Christ *paid in full* every wrong thing I'm ever going to do, have done and ever will do.

How do I get rid of guilt? By accepting the free gift that He is offering.

ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

Today we're going to take the Lord's Supper, which is a reminder, a memorial, of what Jesus Christ did. But the Bible says the memorial is only for those who've accepted that gift. If you've never accepted what Jesus Christ did for you, you need to do so this morning. You need to open your life up to the love of Jesus Christ.

Prayer:

Before we take the Lord's Supper would you bow your heads with me? When they nailed those nails into the hands of Jesus Christ they went right through His hands into the heart of God. God loves you and Jesus proved it. Jesus said, "It is finished." That means salvation is complete. You can't add anything to it. Would you accept what He's done for you? The Bible says, "*The wages of sin is death.*" Jesus Christ died for you. Why? Because He loves you. "*God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish*, [should not be penalized, should not be punished] *but have eternal life.*"

Would you right now in your heart express gratitude, thanksgiving for what Jesus Christ has done? In your heart would you say right now, "Thank You for going through all of that. I don't understand it all but I know I've done wrong. I've sinned. You died for me. Today I want to accept what You've done for me. I ask You to come into my life. Thank You for Your forgiveness."