

# Week of Meetings 1974-02 Romans 1:21

by James R. Cochrane

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of genuine, authentic thanksgiving, which springs from recognizing God's lovingkindness and watching what He is doing in our lives.*

**Duration:** 43:08

**Scripture:** Psalm 40:5, Acts 16:25, Romans 8:28, 2 Corinthians 4:8, Ephesians 5:18, Ephesians 5:20, 1 Thessalonians 5:16

**Topics:** "Gratitude To God", "Thankfulness And Prayer"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by referencing 2 Timothy 3:1, which warns of perilous times in the last days where people will be lovers of themselves and money. The speaker then shares a personal anecdote about a man named Mr. Peterkin and a young man in a park. Mr. Peterkin teaches the young man the importance of gratitude and saying thank you. The speaker reflects on the beauty of God's creation and expresses gratitude for a nation that sets aside a day to give thanks to God.

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## Transcript

Over sixty years ago, a young man left the island of Barbados and made his way to Vancouver, Canada, and took employment with one of the Canadian banks in that city. His name was Mr. Arthur Peterkin, and he, together with a number of other people in that city, approximately sixty years ago, met together in the first testimony of what is known as Christian Brethren in that province of Canada. Shortly afterwards, he was commended to what we call full-time Christian service, and for two years he served God in the provinces of British Columbia and Alberta.

And then, feeling deep within his heart a call from God for service overseas, he was sent out as a missionary to the Argentine, where he spent approximately five years in the service of God. And one of the outstanding results of his ministry as a young missionary was the conversion of a Roman Catholic priest, who for many years, and perhaps still, is in the service of God in that great republic of South America. When Mr. Peterkin returned to Vancouver on his first furlough, he received a letter from a man called Mr. Smith, who had been employed in a Scottish railway in the Argentine and had been transferred to a small railway in the Dominican Republic.

And he was an accountant, and he wrote to Mr. Peterkin and asked him if he would consider returning to the Dominican Republic instead of the Argentine. So he took it as an indication of the will of God, and he went to the little town of Sanchez on the southern coast of the Dominican Republic, where Mr. Smith lived. And after spending two or three days with him, he took the train and went to the other end of the line, the

city of La Vega, in the heart of the Dominican Republic, and he made it his home.

And he served God in that land for approximately twelve years. One of the early pioneer missionaries in the Dominican Republic, he laid the groundwork for much of the work that had developed there over the years. And then, because of problems with his family, education needs, he moved back to Barbados and lived there the rest of his life in active service for God.

In 1964-65, he visited the Dominican Republic, the first time since he had left many years before. And during those years, or during those months, approximately six months, he lived with us in the Dominican Republic. We had known him before, and to see him once again in that land was a great joy.

As he lived in our home, we often traveled together, and many times we would walk up to the main park in the city of Santiago, where we lived at that time. And on one occasion, in that park, with Mr. Peterkin, back in 1964-65, I remember that we were looking at some of the trees in the park, and he was very interested in natural things and the beauty of God's creation. And his eye caught some of these beautiful orchids that we have down in the tropics, and he stood looking at these flowers.

And then all of a sudden, a young man came running along, and he stopped right in front of us. And he said to Mr. Peterkin, Mr. Peterkin, what time is it? Mr. Peterkin wore the chain and the old watch in his watch pocket, and he brought out his watch, and he told the young man what time it was. And the young man looked at him, and he must have realized it was much later than he had thought it was, and he went off like a shot, running across the park.

And Mr. Peterkin turned, and he put his two hands to his mouth, and he called out in a strong voice in Spanish, muchacho, which simply means boy. And the boy heard it, and he stopped, and he came back, and he was agitated. And he looked at Mr. Peterkin, and he said, what is it? And Mr. Peterkin turned to the young man, and he said, don't you know how to say thank you? And the young man looked very sleepish, and he said, thank you, sir.

And he was gone, and he ran out the park, away on his business. I remember that this morning. It wasn't in 64 or 65.

It was before that, some years before that. And Mr. Peterkin on that occasion brought to my attention in a very graphic way how unthankful so many people are. This is Thanksgiving Day in the United States of America.

It's not Thanksgiving Day in the Dominican Republic, nor is it in Canada. I'm a Canadian. But in your great country, it is a day that nationally people are remembering and thanking God for many of the blessings that He has given to us.

I think it's a very wonderful thing, not that we concur in perhaps the spirit of Thanksgiving that many express, for it is shallow. It is not authentic and genuine. But the need to pause and give thanks to God is imperative in all of our lives.

One of the main characteristics of the human race from its beginnings right up until the present time is unthankfulness. That is, that men and women who have received so much from God are not aware of it and are very slow to turn around and thank God. Let me take you just for a moment to the book of Romans, in chapter 1. In this book, Paul takes us back to the very beginnings of our human race.

And he says in verse 20 of Romans 1, verse 21, because that when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God. Neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Now in this dark picture right in the center is the lack of thanksgiving.

For one of the things that the Spirit of God emphasizes is this, neither were thankful. Now let's go back again in the verse. Because that when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful.

You may wonder for a moment, what was the reason for thanksgiving? Well, there is no knowledge of God apart from revelation. No man or woman from within himself has ever attained to the knowledge of God. We would have absolutely no knowledge of God were it not for the gift of revelation that God has given to us, has manifested to us something of Himself.

Back in verse 19 of this same chapter, because that which may be known of God is manifested in them, for God has showed it unto them. Then verse 20 tells us of the revelation, that in the great creation of which we form a part, we can clearly see the eternal power and Godhead of God, so that we are without excuse. God gave to men in the beginning of our human race the gift of revelation.

He made Himself known in this great world in which we live. But men rejected the knowledge of God, and there was no spirit of thanksgiving in men. They turned from God, and turning from God, they moved into all kinds of superstition.

Maybe some of you have read Michener's novel, *The Source*, the great book of a contemporary American novelist, and he goes right back to the beginnings of the human race. But the theory behind this book is evolutionary religion. That is, that man in his beginnings had no knowledge of God and no spiritual dimension to his life.

And then a day came when he took a first step, we call it animism, when he saw in the mountains and in the clouds and in the lakes and in the rivers a spiritual counterpart to all things tangible and material. And animism still exists in many parts of the world today. And then men grew in his knowledge of God and came to what we call polytheism, a great plurality of gods, all kinds of gods, some of them conceptual, some of them material, tangible.

And polytheism is visible in many parts of the world today, India, Africa, Asia, a great multitude of so-called gods. But as man struggled in the quest of the knowledge of God, he came eventually to pantheism, where God and the cosmos, they moved together into one and the same thing. But eventually in Judaism, and then finally in Christianity, man achieved the concept of monotheism, that there is one true living God.

Paul tells us clearly in Romans 1 that that is wrong. In the very beginning of our human race, God revealed to man the knowledge of Himself, His Godhead, His eternal power. And man, who on the basis of that revelation knew God, turned from God.

He was not thankful. There was no thanksgiving that sprang from his heart in response to the revelation given to him from God. And thus as he turned from God, then he moved into superstition, into idolatry, and all the things we've referred to this morning are simply the signs of the spiritual disintegration of man.

But it goes back to our beginnings, the lack of thankfulness for what God has given to us. And then if you turn to the writings of Timothy, 2 Timothy, you'll remember that chapter in which Paul speaks of the things that will happen at the end of this age. And right in the midst of this catalog, dark and tragic, you read in

chapter 3 and verse 1, This know also that in the last days perilous times shall come, for men shall be lovers of their own selves and covetous.

Lovers of self, lovers of money. Perhaps the parents of all the evil we find in the world today. Boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truth-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof.

From such, Paul says, turn away. Right in the middle of that dark list is the word unthankful. It's translated this way in other versions, void of all gratitude, a lack of thanksgiving, of thankfulness to God.

I mention this this morning because perhaps to some of us we may feel that in our world there are many people who are thankful and who in some way praise God for the things that they have. But surely Romans 1 and 2 Timothy 3 refer to that genuine, authentic thanksgiving, not to that superficial thanksgiving which is just an expression of egotism, of selfishness, that we boast and are glad of certain material things that we have. But rather that basic knowledge of God and all that God has given to us spiritually first of all and then materially, that response of thanksgiving is lacking in the great majority of human beings today.

In our beginnings, in the end of our race, in the time in between, man is known because of the spirit of this lack of thanksgiving. Now I'd like to make two observations this morning about genuine, authentic thanksgiving. First of all, turn back with me to the Psalms.

The Psalms and in number 26 of the book of Psalms you have reference, beautiful reference to authentic, genuine thanksgiving. Psalm 26 and first of all verse 3. It reads as follows, Psalm 26 and verse 3, For thy lovingkindness is before mine eyes, and I have walked in thy truth. Then verse 6, I will wash mine hands in innocency, so will I compass thine altar, O Lord, that I may publish with the voice of thanksgiving and tell of all thy wondrous works.

Now we'll never enter into the spirit of verse 7 until we begin with verse 3, For thy lovingkindness is before mine eyes. That awareness that God is active, that God is working in a spirit of love and kindness, that's the basis of genuine thanksgiving. Not what we have achieved, or what we have done, or what we have gained, but the fact that our thanksgiving springs from watching what God is doing in all the circumstances of life and to have that deep conviction that what God does is in the spirit of love and of kindness.

Now we enter here into some of those very delicate and tragic experiences of life when sometimes we don't understand what God is doing. But we'll never respond with praise and worship and thanksgiving unless we have that conviction that God always moves in relationship to His people in the spirit of lovingkindness. The psalmist says, It's before mine eyes.

I have seen God active in love and in kindness. So then he adds in verse 6, I will wash my hands in innocency so I will compass thine altar, O Lord. Coming in that spirit of holiness into the presence of God in order to publish with the voice of thanksgiving and tell of all my wondrous works.

Some of you friends that have known us for some time may have received a letter from us last week or the week before, and in it reference was made that Grace and I on Monday of this week came to the point of our 25th wedding anniversary. And as we thought about this, the two of us together, the Lord led us to Psalm 40 and verse 5. And I would like to share it with you this morning. Many, O Lord my God, are thy

wonderful works which thou hast done and thy thoughts which are toward us.

They cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee. If I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered. We thought of that in view of 25 years.

Some of you are well beyond that mark in your married lives. And you can look behind and think of the many, many things. And if you would like to declare and speak of them, the psalmist says they are more than can be numbered.

Even in those dark moments in our lives, as we look back now from a different perspective, we look back and see the action of God in loving kindness. And because of that, we draw near to the altar of God in a spirit of holiness to publish with the voice of thanksgiving the marvelous things that our God has done. May I then summarize again in this thought.

We will never express genuine thanksgiving if we are limited to what we do or what we achieve or what we have. That's a very superficial spirit of thanksgiving. Genuine thanksgiving begins when you stand back and watch what God is doing.

And especially some of us this morning who can look back over a number of years and think of all that God has done, we have abundant reason to raise that voice of thanksgiving and publish what He has done. Now, the second observation is more difficult. And I don't, as I referred to it this morning, suggest that I can penetrate all the mysteries in this element of thanksgiving.

But one thing we cannot do is avoid the clear language of Scripture. So I'd like you to turn with me now to the New Testament, to Ephesians chapter 5. And in verse 20, a well-known verse that may have appeared on some of your calendars this morning that you've read in your own homes, Paul writes in Ephesians 5 and verse 20, giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is, we must reject arbitrary thanksgiving.

Genuine, authentic thanksgiving is not limited to the things that we like and we enjoy. It's linked to all things, knowing that behind them is a loving God who cares for us and who watches over us. In verse 18 of this chapter, references made to being drunk with wine were in his expense.

Paul says that is not what we are to do, but we are to be filled with the Spirit. And the music that flows out of the Spirit-filled life has one predominant note, and it is thanksgiving. Now let me read again verse 20.

Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Then turn with me to 1 Thessalonians 5 and in verse 18, the Apostle Paul writes again on this subject and he says, Ephesians 1, chapter 5 and verse 18, In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you, whence not the Spirit. Now going back to verse 16 of this chapter, Rejoice evermore, the Spirit of joy.

Pray without ceasing, the Spirit of prayer. And then verse 18, the Spirit of thanksgiving In everything give thanks, these three things linked together, joy, prayer, and thanksgiving are all part of our Christian experience. And to lack in any of them leads to the quenching of the Spirit of God.

Joy, notice what the verse says, rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks. Now evermore, ceasing, or without ceasing, and in everything are very comprehensive terms. And though we might like to limit them, it's very difficult to do that.

To do that is to run contrary to the spirit of the language of Holy Scripture. Without ceasing, evermore, in all things, in everything, thus there is to be a spirit of joy and of thanksgiving and of prayer that runs right through all of the experiences of our life. The last verse in this connection that I would leave with you this morning is found in Romans chapter 8, another very well-known verse.

Romans chapter 8, and I refer to verse 28. On a day like Thanksgiving Day, it's good to come back and remember some of these verses that we're all extremely familiar with. Romans 8 and verse 28, and we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.

Now it's emphatic, we know. Paul speaks very clearly that all things work together for good to them that know God, to them that are called according to His purpose. The last two phrases, I think, are very important.

To them that love God, that has to do with us, that response of love to God. But the last phrase has to do with God's knowledge of us who are called according to His purpose. God has a purpose.

We respond to God in love. And with authority, Paul writes, we know that all things work together for good to them that love God. There cannot be, then, arbitrary Thanksgiving.

And on this Thanksgiving morning, as we look back over this year, there may be things that we think of with sadness. There may be many things that bring sorrow to our hearts. There may be many moments of joy and of happiness.

But authentic Thanksgiving covers everything with the knowledge that God is working together for our good. Verse 29 brings into focus what that good is. The very center of the verse, to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Not just in that coming day when morally and physically we will bear the image of the Lord Jesus, but even now progressively, growing more and more into the knowledge and the likeness of the Lord Jesus. This is the great good to which all things are working as God in loving kindness deals with us day by day. Now I share with you one or two illustrations in connection with this thought of rejecting arbitrary Thanksgiving.

Many have linked together the experience of Paul here in Roman faith with the experience of Jacob, a well-known thought that I shared with you again this morning. Jacob was an old man. He'd gone through perhaps the greatest tragedy of his life when Joseph, his favorite son, to all intents and purposes, had been killed by a savage, wild animal.

The brothers had brought back his coat stained with blood. And they told their father a lie, that they found it by the wayside. And there was no doubt that Joseph had been killed.

And Jacob lamented for that son, for he dearly loved him. You may remember that the Bible says he loved Joseph, for he was the son of his old age. Most of you here know what had happened to Joseph.

His brothers had sold him into slavery. And it was down in Egypt that finally Joseph arrived, went through some terrible experiences, but eventually, in the purpose of God, he achieved the highest place of preeminence in Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. And then when the famine came, Jacob sent his surviving sons down into Egypt to buy food.

And when they arrived, they were brought into the presence of Joseph, their brother. They did not know him, but Joseph knew his brother. And on that occasion, if you remember the story, he withdrew from them, overwhelmed with emotion.

He recognized his brothers. He asked them all kinds of questions, but especially about their father. Was he still alive? And about a younger brother, his full brother Benjamin.

And he too was still alive. I won't go into the details, but when they left, Joseph said to them, now don't you come back again looking for food unless you bring your younger brother, Benjamin. And when the brothers went home with the abundance of food, they enjoyed it, but as the time went, the famine continued.

And the food ran out. And there was nothing they could do but go back to Egypt, but they would not go back without Benjamin. And when they shared with their father Jacob what the man had said, unless you bring him, don't come back, Jacob turned to his sons and he said, all these things be against me.

He'd lost Joseph, and all he was going to lose, he thought, his younger son Benjamin. And he wailed that day, all these things be against me. Now you know, and I know that that was not true, that God was working in all of those experiences in order to give Jacob abundant blessing, to bring the whole family down to Egypt, to make out of a family a great and mighty nation, eventually to be taken back to the land of Canaan, a nation in which eventually the Messiah would be born, the Savior of the world.

All things were working together for good. But in the immediate circumstances, Jacob could not perceive it. Perhaps many of us have gone through circumstances that in the moment we could not understand.

We could not find any answer in the immediate moment. But faith stands back and says with Paul, but we know that all things work together to them that know God, to them that are called according to His purpose. If we share sometimes the attitude of Jacob, it's simply because we're so close to the event that we can't really see what God is doing.

It takes that spirit of faith and sometimes of time to stand back and to acknowledge that God is working in loving kindness. But there are some of those circumstances, and this I speak from personal experience, that perhaps we will never clearly understand until we stand in the presence of the Lord. But in that day, we will look back with the full assurance that in the experiences of our life, all things were working together for good.

Perhaps some of you have read that beautiful and tender story of Hudson Taylor written by John Pollock and called Hudson Taylor and Marie. If you haven't, I would strongly recommend you read that book. Most of us who've read the great biographies of Hudson Taylor will have a new appreciation of this man and of his life and service for God through the reading of Hudson Taylor and Marie.

It is limited to his first marriage. I believe it lasted approximately 12 years. I come to you this morning from the Dominican Republic.

Anything that I have known in missionary work can surely not be compared to what a man like Hudson Taylor went through so many long years ago in inner China. Alone, disliked by the people, and in great adversity and problems and so on, he faithfully served God. But that day came when his wife, seriously ill, passed into the presence of the Lord and it left him devastated.

There was no one to turn to. He was alone in that part of China, and he withdrew into a room and in hours he struggled in the presence of God. And finally he came to the place where he knelt down in the spirit of worship and submission and of thanksgiving in the presence of God.

And he rose a stronger, a spiritually stronger man and went on for many, many long years in the service of God in China. I went through an experience with a close friend similar to that one of Hudson Taylor. This took place in the Dominican Republic, a close and trusted Dominican colleague.

Still one of my choices and closest friend. And his young wife, 31 years of age, suddenly, without any illness, was called home to be with the Lord. Though I've gone through many experiences of death amongst friends and families, this case was unique.

For we saw in this young man, approximately 32 or 33 years of age, a spirit of worship and of thanksgiving and a recognition of the sovereignty of God and of the goodness of God that was expressed amongst his friends and family, personally, privately, and even publicly on the day of the funeral. I refer to these matters this morning because thanksgiving must not be arbitrary. Genuine, sincere thanksgiving takes all the things that God brings into our lives.

Not that we understand them all. Not that we find joy in all of the experiences. But there is that confidence that God is working.

And we come before Him in that spirit of praise and even of thanksgiving. Another illustration that I would bring to you this morning is just a little different, but in the Dominican Republic about 10 to 15 years ago, we had the joy, as I've shared with you on previous occasions, of going into the penitentiary where the gospel of the Lord Jesus was preached and of seeing men converted and brought to God. And I well remember on a number of occasions hearing men stand up in the penitentiary and where before their hearts had been filled with vengeance and hate and thoughts of getting out of jail and the things that they would do against the men that had sent them to jail.

And then they'd been touched by the grace of God and converted. And they would stand up and you would hear them giving thanks publicly for the day that God had brought them to the penitentiary. For they recognized and in the sovereignty of God they had been brought to that place where they'd come into the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior and of Lord.

I remember the joy it brought to our hearts, I and my Dominican colleagues, for we had known them prior to conversion and then after conversion. And to see in the early days of their conversion that Christian node of thanksgiving, no longer filled with vengeance, no resentment, but thanking God they had been brought there and then beginning to use their time to take the gospel to their fellow prisoners. You may remember in the New Testament cases like Peter who stood with the Lord Jesus and rebuked the Lord Jesus when He talked of the cross and of suffering and how the Lord Jesus turned to him and said, Peter, get thee behind me, Satan.

Thou art an offense unto me, for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those things that be of men. And how afterwards in his old age, he writes a letter to his spiritual children in which he says to them, Now rejoice and give thanks to God that you can share in the sufferings of the Lord Jesus, knowing that the day is coming when we will rejoice with great joy. Now there was a change and the change was that filled with the Spirit of God and an understanding of the things of God.

He counted it a joy to suffer in fellowship with the Lord Jesus. He's very clear for suffering brings no reward and there's no thought of thanksgiving. But to suffer as a Christian, there's reason for praise and adoration and thanksgiving.

Paul writes about the same thing when he says that we have been called on the behalf of Christ not only to believe in Him but also to suffer for His sake. And he speaks in 2 Corinthians 4 of that suffering for Jesus' sake. The New Testament speaks clearly of men like Paul and Silas who in a dungeon and at midnight could sing praises, triumphant songs and give thanks to God.

Thus as we begin our meditation on this Thanksgiving Day, and I'd like to go on on the same theme this evening, let us remember that genuine thanksgiving begins with witnessing what God is doing in loving kindness and not in what we have done or what we have achieved. And secondly, there is no room for arbitrary thanksgiving but in the grace of God acknowledging that in all things, in everything, forevermore, and without ceasing, there should be joy and prayer and thanksgiving for all things work together for good to them that love God. Please take your hymn book and I'd like you to sing this morning with me in closing at the back of the hymn book and the inside cover this well-known hymn How Good is the God We Adore our faithful, unchangeable friend whose love is as great as His power and knows neither measure nor end.

Let us stand as we sing the two verses of this hymn. How good is the God we adore is Jesus For this Thanksgiving Day we thank you for a nation that takes time in a national sense to acknowledge the goodness of God and to give thanks. We would not look this morning on those that surround us in a critical spirit.

Rather, we would ask for grace to look into our own hearts and into our own lives. And we pray that the Spirit of God will fill us today with joy and with a spirit of prayer and with a spirit of thanksgiving. As we look back over this year, we thank you for all that you have done.

We thank you for every evidence of your grace, your goodness, and your kindness to us. We pray that you will spare us from that spirit of unthankfulness which is prevalent in the world today. We thank you for your loving kindness.

And we thank you this morning for all the things that you have brought into our lives. And we pray that as a result we have grown in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. And now unto the King Eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, the honor and glory forever and ever.

Amen. You may be seated.

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