

# Unusual Thanks

by Jim Cymbala

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of uncommon thanks, including thanking God for people who have been a blessing in our lives and for the things that didn't happen, such as God's mercy and protection.*

**Duration:** 25:15

**Scripture:** Luke 23:41

**Topics:** "Thanksgiving"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of keeping our minds focused on Jesus. He explains that when we keep our minds on Jesus, we are able to praise, love, and rejoice in Him, leading to victory in our Christian lives. The preacher also highlights the story of the thief on the cross who recognized Jesus' innocence and purity, and how this revelation led him to repent and ask for forgiveness. The sermon concludes with a reminder to express gratitude to the people God has used in our lives and to not take them for granted.

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## Transcript

I want to talk to you about uncommon thanks, or rare thanks, or unusual thanks. I find it in two different passages, and to get to the first one I have to tell a little story. I was reminded as I was taping something for a Thanksgiving special that our church does and is put on the radio with testimonies from people in our church and me with a Thanksgiving message.

Every day is Thanksgiving for a Christian. You don't need the Thursday in November to celebrate, we should always be giving thanks. But I want to talk today about things we rarely give thanks for.

Most people give thanks, they get a new house, they get a new apartment, a baby is born, they get to go on a vacation, they get a raise, they get a new car, and they thank God for that. And those are all proper. But then there are things that in the Bible we find people thanking God for which should awaken us.

When David was running from King Saul, those of you who know your Old Testament, David who had slew Goliath, King Saul got jealous of him and David's on the run. And David's living with a militia of about 600 men and he's wandering around in the wilderness and rocks and caves and places where Saul can't find him. And he settled for a while in a certain part of the land where there was a very rich landowner by the name of Nabal, N-A-B-A-L.

And Nabal had all kinds of cattle, all kinds of sheep, and a huge spread right near the city of Carmel in Israel. The only thing about Nabal is he had all this money and all these things, but he was a fool. He was mean-spirited and a nasty disposition, and he had no wisdom whatsoever.

He was a fool. The Bible calls him that. And he was married to this beautiful, intelligent woman by the name of Abigail.

It was sheep-shearing time and David knew that that's the time of celebration, feasting, and he's on the run with these men. And all the time he's been living there, he's been taking care of people who work for Nabal, not only not stealing from them, but making sure nobody else hassled them. So at sheep-shearing time, during this time of festivities and food, he sends some of his men to Nabal and says, listen, we're coming in the name of David.

You know who David is. He's famous. David wants you to know that he congratulates you.

You're cashing in on your produce and so on and so forth. And at this time where there's a lot of food and celebration, could you remember David? And he's sending us, could you give us something to share with, which was common to being hospitable and all of that, sharing in the produce, sharing in the blessing of God. And Nabal waited for a while and then he said, who's David? I don't want to know about David.

I'm giving you the Brooklyn version of the King James here. I don't know David. Hey, there's lots of runaway slaves.

There's lots of runaway people. Who do you know you can trust? And why should I give any bread or water or food to some guy named David? I don't care, David. And go back and tell him that.

And the men who David sent were already thinking, this is not a good idea, Nabal, but we will do it. The word goes back to David. David, first word he says in the Bible, put your swords on.

We're going to go. That's how he answered you? That's what he said? It's going to be like that? Okay, fine. The sun will not go down tonight until I wipe out not only Nabal, but everyone who works with him.

And David's off to the races. Abigail comes home. She wasn't there.

And the servants tell her, you won't believe this. David sent some men, famous David. He's on the run.

You know that. King Saul's jealous, trying to kill him. He sent some people.

And you know your husband, all due respect, Ms. Abigail, but your husband's not exactly the wisest person I've ever met. He's a nasty disposition. And here's what he told him.

He told him to get lost. And I don't think this is going to work well for Nabal, your husband, but you know what he's like. That's pretty sad when the servants have to tell a wife, you know what your husband's like.

But so it was. She then gets a lot of food together, puts it on some donkeys, horses, whatever, and says to some of the servants, let's get going. We got to cut David off at the pass.

We got to get to him before he gets to Nabal, because she's not sure what David's doing, but she doesn't think it's going to be good. So sure enough, God makes it possible for her to meet David before David can meet her husband. And here's what she says to him.

Please, sir, accept this present. That's the food I brought you and give it to your men. Please forgive me, sir, for any wrong I have done.

She did nothing. The Lord will make you king. She knew that.

And your descendants also. She knew that prophetically, because you are fighting his battles, the Lord's battles, and you will not do anything evil as long as you live. If anyone should attack you and try to kill you, the Lord, your God will keep you safe as someone guards a precious treasure.

As for your enemies, however, he will throw them away as someone hurls stones with a sling. And when the Lord has done all the good things he has promised you and has made you king of Israel, then you will not have to feel regret or remorse, sir, for having killed without cause or having taken your own revenge. And when the Lord has blessed you, sir, please do not forget me.

David said to her, praise the Lord, the God of Israel, who sent you today to meet me. Thank God for your good sense and for what you have done today in keeping me from the crime of murder and from taking my own revenge. The Lord has kept me from harming you, but I swear by the living God of Israel that if you had not hurried to meet me, all of Nabal's men would have been dead by morning.

Then David accepted what she had brought him and said to her, go back home and don't worry, I will do what you want. And you notice there that David gave thanks, but he gave thanks for things we rarely do. The more you walk with the Lord, the more mature you get, the deeper your faith grows.

You realize that some of God's choices, gifts are not things, but people, people, people that he sends into your life. A mother like I have and a dad, although he had his struggles, he treated me well for the most part. You thank God for a pastor, you thank God for some friend who had input in your life, who made the difference between going this way and that way, or when you were down and ready to quit.

God sent somebody in your life and they helped you, an aunt or an uncle who had an unusual influence on your life. Those are gifts from God. People are gifts from God.

And we, unfortunately, not only don't thank them, we don't even thank God on top of that for sending them. Let's go to the first place. It is rare, and I challenge all of you, I plead with all of you, whoever has blessed you, whoever's been good to you, if it's an aunt, an uncle, a mom, or a dad, or somebody on your job, somebody that God has sent into your life, every one of us has a different story, but there are critical people in our lives.

I'm thinking of my late father-in-law, Carol's dad. What an impact he had on my life, all the hours he spent with me. I think of another minister, Pastor Dave Hannon, who met me when I was an off-the-wall college student, playing basketball and doing all of that, but just full of myself and didn't know where I was going.

And he saw something in me. I didn't see it. I don't know anyone saw it.

And he saw something in me, took time with me, would take me out for coffee after a service and talk to me about the things of God and tell me stories about his experiences in Bible school. And that whet my appetite. I would break down and start weeping in a coffee shop in Bay Ridge.

He just took time with me. I didn't have anything to give him. I'm thinking the minister who married me to my wife, whose church I went to for a while.

He's still alive. He had an impact. He would call me sometimes and say, at 10 o'clock at night, meet me at a diner.

I just want to talk to you. I was in the business world. I wasn't in the ministry.

Or aunts and uncles. I had an uncle, Stan, who got me involved in sports when I was so little. Took me to see baseball games and the first time to Madison Square Garden.

But always would bring Jesus into it. Always, Jim, you got to remember Jesus. Jim, Jesus.

Just little. Jesus, remember Jesus. I remember an aunt who sat with me in a service when I was real little in Milford, Connecticut.

And the spirit of the Lord came in that meeting. And I remember I was always fussing and fooling around or not paying attention. But I remember stopping and looking up.

I can see my little head like, what is that I'm sensing? That's something different. The preacher had stopped. People were singing.

And I knew something was happening. No one was manufacturing it. No one was yelling in the microphone.

Come on, everybody. Give God the glory and all that. No, this was the presence of the Lord.

And I turned to her and I said, what is that, Auntie May? And she said, oh, Jimmy, that's the presence of the Lord. Sometimes he comes and is gentle and you just cry. Sometimes he comes and you want to shout.

These are important people in my life. So I challenge all of you, whoever it is, if they're alive, thank them. Because once they're gone, you can't say a word.

Thank them today. Send an email to them. Call them.

Don't take them for granted. You wouldn't be where you are today if it wasn't for some people. Am I right, everybody here in the Alto section? There are people who God has used, like he used Abigail with David.

David is thanking Abigail. I thank you. You just saved me some a mess.

I would have made a mess if it wasn't for you. How many people in our lives could we say that about? We would have made a mess, small or large, if it wasn't for that person's influence, their words. And we just take it for granted.

We can get so self-centered, we feel like we deserve these people. No, they're gifts from God. How many have some people in your life, they have been a blessing with a capital B? Come on, lift it up high.

Been a blessing. We not only should thank them, but here's what we rarely do. David starts to thank God.

Oh, I thank God for sending you. It's not just you I thank. I see he's behind it.

He sent you into my life. Just like there's money in our wallets today, we got to thank God. He's the one who put the money in our wallets.

He's the one who put those people in our lives, and we rarely ever thank God for people. You don't hear that one out of a thousand. You don't hear people at the altar when we're praising God.

Oh God, we thank you for healing. Yes, we thank God for this, that, the other. All right.

Those are all good things. I thank God he brought my mom through surgery, but we don't hear people. God, I thank you for sending that person in my life.

Oh God, I praise you for that. How my life might've worked out if it wasn't for these gifts you sent to me. Remember, God uses people when he blesses us often.

He uses people. So David thanked God for Abigail. Notice something else here.

He thanked God for people, but he also thanked God for saving him for what might've happened. So I just want to do real talk with you for a second. Isn't it true for all of us? Come on, private now, just you and God and me and God.

Things could have gone another way, couldn't it? Why did you grow up in a family and someone got in trouble or your family members got in trouble or went off and hurt themselves and you were dabbling with the same thing, but it didn't work out that way for you. He preserved you. Don't I get an amen here from somebody? Wasn't there a fork in the road and a lot of people were taking it and you went down it for a little while and then he caught you and he put you back on the right fork.

Am I right or wrong here? Hey, listen, for all of us, think where we could have been today. We were doing the same stuff other people were doing. He not only preserved us from the sowing and reaping principle.

A lot of us have not reaped what we sowed. We sowed some junk and we got blessing. God's in his mercy.

Am I right or wrong here? But not only that, think about God has put a blanket over some of our worst days and nobody knows and our reputations are intact and people look at us and greet us, but they don't know the half of it for some of us. I know this is very intrusive, but I'm not getting specific, so can we say amen to that? Has God not been merciful? No wonder Becky's singing with the choir over a thousand tongues to praise your name. Think of how it might have worked out.

Could have worked out much different than it worked out. Who was behind that? Almighty God. Most people thank God for what he did in our lives.

I want to remind you, you got to thank God for what he didn't do in your life because he could have done a lot of stuff. Come on, how many are with me? It's a little deeper thought. Wave your hand at me so I could just see if you're getting it.

Oh yeah, we need to thank God for that. We really need to thank God that we're here today intact serving the Lord. He's rescued us from the mouth of the lion.

Why didn't the lion get us like he got other people? Because God saved us from it. What didn't happen, just think of some of the messes that we could be in today and when you look at it and you analyze, all you can say is thank you Jesus. God, great is your faithfulness.

Your mercies are new. How often? Every single day, great is your faithfulness. Lastly, I want to give one more thanksgiving.

So we got what? We got thanking God for people that he has sent in our lives and we want to thank God for things that didn't happen. See, David said, oh wow, did God just save me from a mess? I would have wiped the floor with everybody. There'd be blood like a river and then after it was over, I would have been so ashamed and that would have been on my hands forever, forever.

Oh, I'm thinking back to one point in my life. I can't go near telling you everything, but oh, what God saved me from. What God saved me from.

Very vulnerable, weak point, nerve shattered. Oh, what God saved me from. But you have your own.

Don't you have your own? Yes. Can we just lift our hands and praise him for people? Come on, just praise him for some people. Think of some people and say, thank you Lord for that person.

Tell them thank you. Then thank you for not letting it work out the way it could have worked out. I praise you God.

We honor you God. We're not ashamed to lift our hands to you God. We're not ashamed in your house to lift our hands and say, gracias senior por todos senior.

For all these people that you've blessed us with, help us to remember them and thank them and help us to thank you more Lord. Every good gift comes from you, including people. We praise you for it and praise you for sparing us like you did David, some nasty circumstances.

Thank you Lord. Thank you Lord. You may put your hands down.

One last one. Look at it. It's Jesus.

It's Jesus at the communion table, the last supper. Let's look at it. While they were eating, Jesus took a piece of bread and he gave a prayer of what? Thanks.

He broke it and he gave it to his disciples. Take and eat it. He said, this is my body.

Then he took a cup and he gave thanks to God and he gave it to them. Drink it. All of you.

He said, this is my blood, which seals God's covenant. My blood poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. Listen, my blood poured out for many for the forgiveness of sin.

It struck me as I was reading this this week, that Jesus was the first one to thank God for the cross, even before it happened. And he, even though he was going to endure the agony, he took the bread, which was going to be his body, which would be pulverized on the cross. And he said, now take, this is my body.

Let's thank God for it. And he's the one who had to go through it. Now this is the cup.

This is the cup representing my blood, which is going to seal the new covenant. This blood is going to be shed for the forgiveness of sin for many forgiveness of sin, the putting away of sin. That's how all relationships starts with God.

You must come to Jesus and have your sins forgiven. Can't enter into his family. Can't enjoy the peace and joy that he has for you.

You can't be counted in the Lamb's book of life. You can't know you're going to have eternal life. You can't know about heaven.

It all begins with one thing. Your sins have to be forgiven. And Jesus said, I'm going to the cross and many through my death, those who trust in me, many will know forgiveness of sin.

There's no better feeling in the world than to know your sins are gone. Which sins? Every sin. How about the big ones? Yeah, those two.

How about the little ones? Yeah, they're gone too. How about the ones from 30 years ago? Yeah, they're gone. How about the ones since you've been a Christian? They're all gone.

The blood of Jesus cleanses from all sin. How rare we thank God for the cross, for the blood that was shed for us. It struck me this week as I closed that the first person who got forgiveness of sin through the cross of Christ, I bet you Bible students, some of you are already figuring it out and you know, oh, I know who that is.

Some of you might be wondering who was the first convert that enjoyed, not like David and people like that. I'm talking about enjoyed the fruit of the cross, what the cross produced. The first person who knew that forgiveness, got it while it was happening.

The thief on the cross. Remember him? He was one of two thieves. And the word there is not thief, like I'm going to steal this from her.

It's thief like in Brigham, like revolutionary. He might've been connected with Barabbas who was set free. So Jesus would be crucified.

And both of them were on the cross, one on the right, one on the left of Jesus. And both of them, the Bible tells us in one account in the gospels, both were mocking him. The people were mocking him.

The soldiers were mocking him, sneering at him, religious leaders. Hey, if you saved others, why don't you come down and save yourself? The soldiers were mocking him and, oh, this is the Christ. Here, take some of the sour wine we drank and Jesus refused it.

Everybody mocking and sneering. And then on top of that, as he's enduring everything, he's got two thieves next to him and they're mocking him. One says to him in a sarcastic way, if you're the Christ, Christ means anointed one.

If you're the anointed one in a sarcastic way, if you're the anointed one, why don't you get us all out of this? In a sneering way. And they're both reviling him. But somewhere in the afternoon, he died around three.

But sometime before it went dark at noon, Jesus cried, Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing. That must have struck one of the thieves.

You know, it's a mystery. We all hear the same message, but we get different reactions. The other thief was sneering and mocking him all the way to his own death.

But this other thief, something happened when he saw the purity, the innocence, the beauty of Jesus, the mercy. You know, if you keep looking at Jesus, you'll fall in love with him. That's why in the world, Satan's main thing is to get our minds off of Jesus.

No, tomorrow, his main strategy is what? Get your mind diverted off of Jesus as much as possible, totally if possible. Why? Because if you look at Jesus, you fall in love with Jesus. You fall in love.

Ninety percent of the victory in our Christian lives is just keeping our minds on Jesus. Because when your mind is on Jesus, you're either praising him, you're loving him, you're celebrating him, you're rejoicing in him. The last thing you want to do is get in trouble.

Am I correct? If you're thinking about Jesus, or gossip, or slander, or anything. So this must have struck that other thief. And what he says suddenly out of nowhere, Luke tells us, is he goes, hush, hush.

Don't you have any reverence? He says to the other thief, we're up here for something we did. We're guilty. We belong on this cross.

We belong to die, but not him. Notice, he somehow discerned without anyone preaching. Jesus never preached a sermon.

He just, in the presence of Jesus, knew, wait a minute, we're not like him. He's pure and good. We're rotten sinners.

So stop it. Stop mocking him. Don't you have any sense of decency? We deserve it, but not him.

And then he somehow turns his head and says to Jesus, just think how merciful God is, how much Jesus wants to cleanse all of us today. You might have heard in church, it takes 11 steps, and this, and that. Then you got to go to church, you got to go to confession, got to go to a priest, and all of that is all nonsense.

Listen how easy it is. First convert ever. Jesus, when you come into your kingdom, he knew he was a king.

How could he be a king if he's dying on the cross? No, he knew it. He knew it. When you come into your kingdom, I've already confessed, I belong here.

I am a sinner. Oh, am I a sinner? But you're not. You don't even belong here.

I don't totally understand even know why you're up here, but I know you're dying. But when you come into your kingdom, because even though they kill you here, I know there's something beyond here. I know you're the king of kings somehow, and the Lord of lords.

You're better than Pilate. You're better than King Herod. When you come into your kingdom, just think of the faith that took.

When you come into your kingdom, just remember me. Boom, today you'll be with me in paradise. What did he do? What was his track record? How long did he go to church? How many Bible verses did he know? Nothing, nada.

Just Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom. Today, you'll be with me in paradise. It's done.

That's how easy it is to have mercy extended to you. That's why we should be thanking God for the cross today. How many thank God for the cross where we receive mercy and pardon? Come on.

For all the things we've done, can we just hold up our hands and wave them like this for a second? Come on, everybody just say, thank you for the cross, Lord. Thank you for the cross. Thank you for the blood.

Thank you that your body was crucified. Thank you for being the substitute, Lord. I deserve to be on the cross, not you.

I, Jim Simbala, deserves to be punished. Not you, Lord. Never you, Lord, but you did it for me.

We thank you for the cross, Lord. We want you all to stand and thank God for the person next to you. Give somebody a hug.

If you know somebody in the building who you have gratitude for, thank them.

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