

Text: [Philippians 4:10-19](#)
Date: November 11, 2018
Title: “Life FROM God” – With: Reimagining How We Relate to God – Wk 4
Theme: It’s not about the CONTENT of our blessings, but our CONTENTMENT with the blessings.

Intro

So far we’ve talked about the upsides and downsides of various proposals (and prepositions) in our relationship with God
Life OVER God, life UNDER God, even life FOR God – we found some issues with all of them - and in each case contrasted them against life WITH God
Today, we’re going to talk about life FROM God – which I think is fitting on this Sunday prior to Thanksgiving
And we have a great Thanksgiving text from Paul’s letter to the Philippians to consider this morning

Question

What are some of your family’s traditions that celebrate gratitude on Thanksgiving?

1

In one of the churches I served, I remember there was a woman who attended occasionally
Sometimes she would come to my office during the week and we’d discuss something I said on Sunday
She had an odd way of speaking about God – she always talked about “MY God” – “MY God this,” “MY God that”
I was always struck by how odd that turn of phrase was...
as though she had some sort of exclusive relationship with God
as though she was testing me, because maybe the God I was talking about on Sunday mornings wasn’t HER God

It was the French philosopher Voltaire who said, something along the lines of “If we’re made in God’s image, we have returned the favor.”
If you are a Democrat, you probably think Jesus would have voted Democrat. If you are a Republican, likewise.

There have been several studies where students are asked to describe Jesus’ personality using scales like introvert/extrovert, carefree/uptight, those kinds of things
If you then follow up with those same students by giving THEM a personality survey, there’s remarkable correlation

In other words, our vision of Jesus is a lot like looking in the mirror¹
What this tells me is that, even for the most faithful among us, there’s a degree of narcissism in our faith
Jesus becomes a bit of an inkblot test – what do you see?

2

“MY God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” <slide-MY God, RICHES>
Paul uses this unique turn of phrase in his letter to the Philippians
And so this verse – and others like it – have become a kind of inkblot test for Christians

There’s a whole branch of Christianity – represented by preachers of what we sometimes call the “prosperity gospel,” or “name it and claim it” theology – who sees this as a promise
Many of your well-known TV preachers fall in this camp
They’re convinced that in Jesus, EVERYONE can be healthy, wealthy, and good looking – it’s just a matter of faith
This line of thinking is based on verses like Philippians 4:19, among others

God owns everything, and wants to give you a piece of it!
This is the life FROM God theology in a nutshell
And it seems to make sense on the surface – it’s biblical!
James 1:17 - “Every good and perfect gift is from above...”
A great verse for Thanksgiving, right?

Let's look at a few of the other passages that come up a lot in life FROM God & prosperity preaching: <slide-leave this up-3 verses>

"You do not have, because you do not ask." – James 4:2

"You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Although he was rich, he became poor for our sakes, so that you could become rich through his poverty." – 2 Corinthians 8:9

"Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing." – Malachi 3:10

This is a vision of God as – depending on the analogy you like, a kind of divine Pez dispenser, handing out treats to those who are favored OR maybe, since I just got back from Disney – a fairy Godmother, who, if we have enough faith, will make all our wishes come true

3

Now, I know this sounds a little ridiculous

And you might say, "this isn't a problem I have – why are you talking about this?"

First, remember what I said at the beginning – all of our faith has a little narcissism mixed in!

And we can get a sense of whether life FROM God is our problem by carefully considering the content of our prayers

When we pray, are we mostly asking?

Do we talk to God every day – thanking God regardless of how things are going –

or do we only take the time to talk to God when things are really bad?

Or when we need God to DO something for us?

I think, if we're honest about it, many of us fall into this pattern more often than we'd like to admit – we pray MY God prayers

We begin to treat God like a cosmic butler, vending machine, or Pez dispenser

It's also a clue that we're bought into this when our faith doesn't ask much of us –

When we start to drift into a Netflix kind of religion

You know what I mean? Netflix - \$11 a month and you can sit on the couch and watch as much as you want!

Faith with all blessing, no sacrifice is not the way of Jesus

The consumerization of Christianity – it's prevalent, and it's powerful

It's a value proposition – like a lottery ticket – make a small investment, maybe reap a big reward – a “blessed” life

But that's not what we're about

We're aiming for a deep transformation that has the ability to bless not only us, but the whole world

Life FROM God isn't all that interested in blessing the world

So long as we get whatever it is we're looking for!

Last week, I talked about the story of the Prodigal Son

Life FROM God is where the younger son comes in –

you know, the one who comes to his Dad and says, “Give me my share of the inheritance?”

All he wants to know is what Dad has for him

Look again at that Malachi passage

Here, even charity is seen as the means to something else – the idea that when I give more, I will be blessed more –

not just spiritually, but financially

That's certainly good for business, especially when you're preaching on the TV!

A few years ago, a church teaching tithing made the news because they offered a money-back guarantee

“Tithe for 90 days,” the pastor said, “and if God does not improve your financial situation, ask for a refund!”²

4

The problem is, that in order to read the Bible this way – in order to get to this consumerist, blessing-based understanding, you have to rip all these scriptures out of context

Let me show you what I mean: <slide-Context Matters>
Here's James 4:2-3 – remember, that one about asking?

You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures.

How anyone could interpret this passage as license to ask for material blessings for yourself is beyond me! Context matters!

5

Let's come back to where we started – with that passage from Paul, and MY God, who's going to “satisfy every need according to his riches in glory in Christ”

Again, CONTEXT

Paul is writing during one of his imprisonments – I talked about him being imprisoned last week

The church in the Greek city of Philippi was one where Paul had good relationships

They had recently sent him a financial gift – prisoners had to pay their own expenses for food and such –

and part of the reason for the letter was to say thanks

He's grateful, but it also sounds like he's feeling guilty

Guilty that he can't reciprocate

He didn't like being in a position of needing charity

There were times he needed help and support, and he'd received it before, but wherever he could he preferred to work for a living and preach for free

So here he is in prison, telling them: “listen, if I can't return the favor, I will trust that God will” – that's what it means when he says, “my God will satisfy every need according to his riches in glory”

But he also tells them more: he says,

“Thanks for your gift, but I'm good either way.”

“I have learned to be content with whatever I have.

I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty.”
People sometimes read this and are upset by what he says, like he’s being dismissive of a gift – but that’s not the point

6 <slide-content or contentment>

So often we want to talk about the CONTENT of God’s blessings
Especially at this time of year, we thank God for our material blessings, for food, and health and prosperity
All these things come FROM God, no question – we SHOULD be thankful for them – but ultimately, the blessings are not the point

When our relationship with God centers on the blessings, on the asking, on the question of what’s in it for us – we’ve misunderstood
We’ve turned faith into something self-centered – we’ve started too long into the mirror – God is MY God and not OUR Father

It’s not about the CONTENT of our blessings, but rather the CONTENTMENT that we gain by knowing God
This is the difference between life FROM God and life WITH God

Faith isn’t about what we stand to gain
It’s about how we use what we’ve already been given
How we enjoy it, how we care for it, how we share it to bless others
It’s not about the CONTENT of the blessings, but our CONTENTMENT with the blessing

Amen.

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¹ Jethani, Skye. *With: Reimagining the Way You Relate to God* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011), p.61.

² <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/june-web-only/faithful-tithing-now-comes-with-money-back-guarantee.html>