



'I Am Thankful That....'

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The other day I was going through some old notes and I came across words from a pastor named Tim Kerber (who is the pastor of a Baptist Church in Leduc). Tim used these words to introduce himself as his opening remarks as he stood in front of the counsel interviewing him for Ordination. As I read these words you need to know that I was his mentor leading up to his ordination, the Joe Canadian commercials were playing on TV at that time, and presently Tim is the Senior Pastor at the church which our son Matt just became the Youth/Associate pastor. Tim introduced himself with this rousing statement, he said:

I AM not a company C.E.O., the manager of a small business, or a priest. I don't live at the church, or wear a collar, and I don't just hang out with Christians. I don't know Peter from Grace or Mary from Brentview. Although I am sure that I must be related to at least one of them. I don't preach only 3 point sermons, although I really like three. I believe golfing should be part of my ministry. And it's Habakkuk not Habbakuk. I can boldly share my faith and proudly recommend my church as a place for all people. Being Baptist isn't everything, being Christian is. Jesus is my friend, and Savior of the world. And it's about faith, people, not works. Christianity is more than a religion; it is the first and only way to heaven. It is the best way to live. My name is Tim and I am a Baptist Minister.

As you can imagine, Tim passed the Ordination exam. As I was re-reading his comments, along with a lunch I had on Tuesday with another pastor (which I will talk about in a minute) I was struck again with what I am thankful for. So on this beautiful day, let me stir your heart with what we need to be thankful for.

1. I Am... Thankful to Be at Brentview

As a church we are so blessed with who is a part of this church. We have people from Ethiopia, Philipians, India, Pakistan, England, Germany, Scotland, Sweden, China, Ukraine, Japan, Nigeria, Cameroon, Brazil, Argentina, Manitoba and many other countries. Along with this are the blessings of having people who come from so many different church backgrounds, for there is real strength in this. For each denominational background brings with it, its own richness. The Anglicans have brought traditions like the Christmas Advent Candles and the Catholics have brought their ideas of "giving up something for Lent as a way that pushes us deeper into God". The Pentecostals have brought a passion to experience more of Jesus, the Presbyterians have brought an understanding of how precious our forgiveness is and the Baptists have brought a deep love for the Word. I believe that denominations happen because the founders of denominations became enthralled with a particular aspect of God and so when people from various church backgrounds converge under one roof, together we can find a fuller view of who God is.

However, when you have people of varied background worshipping together, some times it means that some who attend do not know much about our Baptist denomination. So let me give you a quick overview of our roots at Brentview. We are part of the North American Baptists; our roots initially go back to when the first German freedom seeking immigrants came to the US. More specifically our particular denomination began as a Pastor named Konrad Flieshman, who began working among German Immigrants in New Jersey. Then over the years as new waves of immigrants hit the shores of Canada, German speaking churches sprung up. The reason why NAB churches have a passion for new comers to Canada is that many of our older members were Immigrants themselves. The NAB is the only denomination which has a membership that includes churches from the USA and Canada. Presently we have 400 churches in North America and 135 churches in Canada, 60 churches of which are in Alberta. We have 70,000 members in NA. Now here is where it gets even more exciting, for folks from our denomination played a key role in telling people about Jesus in Nigeria and the Cameroon. Presently there are 1000 Baptist churches in Cameroon with over 90,000 members and 120 churches in Nigeria with over 10,000 members. We have been crucial in the planting, and growth, we are now partners with those sister denominations which govern themselves.

Together we have cross-cultural workers in Brazil, Cameroon, Japan, Mexico, Nigeria, Philippines and Russia and are presently are feeling a call to be more engaged with India. The budget we share together for this endeavor is over \$7 million a year. As you know as a local church we have folks we are supporting in other places around the world. It has also been interesting to see how we as a church seem to be drawn to caring for children in places like Brazil, Mexico and Haiti.

We exist because of Jesus Christ, who as God, walked all the way to the cross to die for our sins. We exist to let others see, hear and be touched by the same Jesus who touched our lives. I am thankful that the Lord in his wisdom placed us at the Corner of Crow child and the World. That the heart beat of this place is to touch the World for Jesus.

2. I AM ... so thankful for Christ's Love

But don't forget that all that happens here finds it's beginning on the Mt of Olives in Jerusalem. Turn to (*Mark 14:32-41*) (*Matthew 26*) and let me piggy back on the sermon from 2 weeks ago where we talked about Jesus and the Last Supper. The setting for (*Mark 14*) is that Jesus has just had his Last Supper with his Disciples and Jesus knew his journey to the cross had begun. I believe as he neared the cross that the part of him which was God knew exactly what would happen next and it was as if he was increasingly standing in the midst of time. So he knew the lash wasn't far away, and that the nails and cross lay waiting for him. So he went to the quietest place he knew of in Jerusalem. In order to do that he had to go out of the city gates, down a small incline and then climb up through an olive grove for there on a hillside was a rock he knew of, where he could kneel and pray. So, just as it was getting dark, he took his 11 disciples to the garden. Listen what happened (*Mark 14:32-41*)

Look at (*Mark 14:34*) in all your readings of the words of Jesus have you ever heard him exaggerate about how he was feeling or what was happening? Jesus wasn't afraid when he entered the desert, where he knew he would be tempted by the devil for 40 days. Jesus showed no concern when the storm roared around him on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus wasn't the least bit afraid when the man called Legion with a 100 demons rushed him out of the graveyard. So when we read the words in vs. 34 don't miss what is being said here. It wasn't that he was just a little tentative with what was to come next, it had to be that he was so close to the cross that the enormity of it came crashing down upon him. All of us know a little of what that is like, don't we? For we remember studying for an exam, preparing for the birth of our child or preparing for an operation. You were able to hold it together until the paper was placed in front of you on the desk, the contractions reached that point you didn't think you could take any more or when you were being rolled into the operating room and it was then that the enormity of what was about to happen washed over you and the gravity of the situation hit you.

That is what was happening here, Jesus could almost begin to feel the excruciating pain of the lash and nails. He could almost smell the stench of death moving toward him. Jesus could almost feel the sin of mankind begin to crawl on his flesh. And then when he thought of God walking away from him it was almost too much to bare, that is when he said "*his soul was overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.*" it means the struggle was so intense that Jesus had to fight with all his human Godly strength to not run into the night and not die on the cross for our sins.

Vs. 35, 36 says, Jesus hit the place where he says to God "*God you can do anything, so please, please find some other way to make salvation happen, this is too much for me to carry through to the end.*" Stop right there, I believe that because Jesus had free will, he had the ability to choose to walk down that hillside and away from the cross. That means that right here, at this point in time yours and my eternal Salvation hung in the balance. Far too often, we have acted as if, although it was hard for Jesus to die on the cross, because he was God. It was a piece of cake walk to do what he did. Listen to Jesus' words in vs. 36. It was nip and tuck for an hour there on the Mount of Olives. How close did it get? (*Luke 22:43-44*) It got to the point the Father knew he needed Angels to come and care for him, and then with renewed strength he went back to a prayer time which was so intense in its struggle that Dr. Luke said his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

But the struggle didn't end there, Vs. 37, 38, these were fishermen who were accustomed to fishing all through the night (*Luke 5:5*). And yet here in Jesus' most desperate moments, they couldn't stay awake with him for 1 single hour. The disciples were no help to him at all. Don't miss the fact that they heard Jesus say '*My soul is overwhelmed to the point of death*'. They saw him fall on the ground in front of the rock and yet they didn't go and pray with him, or talk to him. Instead they fell asleep 3 times in the midst of his agony. Now this is important, for what I know from personal experience is that for most of us it is not the big battles that destroy our resolve, it is when those we love let us down when we need them the most. Here, in the midst of his agony, I believe Jesus must have wondered "*if even my 3 closest friends don't care enough to stay awake with me for 1 hour, is it really worth it to die for mankind?*"

A while ago I saw a movie on Jesus' life which put an interesting twist to what happened here. In the movie, Satan flashed pictures of the future in Jesus' minds-eye as he prayed in the garden. Pictures of Peter, who within hours yells "*I don't even know who this Jesus is*" of the Christian Crusaders sacking towns, killing 1000's of innocent people to raise money for their Crusade to Jerusalem, of the Spanish Inquisition, of some of the actions we as Christians would do down through the centuries. Then he looked over at his closest friends who he had just told of how much he was hurting and saw them fast asleep. And you heard a huge groan from Jesus' heart as he said "*Is it worth it? This is not my will Father, but yours.*"

Despite the terror of what lay ahead, of how the nails would pierce his skin and our sin would strike his heart, despite the way the disciples sleep would turn to abandonment, despite the way Jesus knew how many of us would let him down, there amidst the Olive grove beside the rock Jesus decided to die for you and I on the cross. And for that "I am so thankful". For despite the wrestling on the Mt. of Olives Jesus caught his resolve, walked to the cross and that has changed our lives and our eternities and for that I am so thankful.

3. I am so thankful that Jesus changes people's lives

And that thought brings me to the lunch I told you about. For last Tuesday I had lunch with a man who is now a Pastor. During our lunch I simply said '*I don't know much about your background so can you tell me about your life?*' As he spoke I sat there almost in disbelief at what I was hearing, often near tears. He told me how he had been raised in abject poverty in Scotland, often as a very young boy living in abandoned buildings with no power or lights or any other facilities, with his mom and sister, dealing with constant hunger due to the lack of food and his mother's alcoholism. Then in his early teens he came to Winnipeg hoping for a new life, but everywhere he turned his relatives struggled with alcoholism and abuse. He ended up living with a relative of a relative who let him stay with her, but again alcoholism and the darker side of life was all around him.

Then one day on the street a person asked if he knew how to get to Vancouver, and because of how desperate his situation was he set off with a complete stranger on a 2 week trip to Vancouver. He said he had almost no food for the whole trip. Upon arriving in Vancouver he then ended up in the Salvation Army shelter for a few weeks followed by a few weeks on the street and then back to the shelter and then back onto the streets until eventually he ended up staying in a run down shack with an old alcoholic who would squeeze the alcohol out of shoe polish to get drunk. It was this flop house, as a teen living on the street that a Christian man (banker) dropped by, cared for and told him about Jesus. He knelt down in that room and gave his heart to the same Jesus who chose to go to the cross for him after the struggle on the Mt. of Olives. He said he didn't feel anything at the time, but after that prayer, when he crossed the street, he waited for the 'walk' sign for the first time in his life. That marked a new beginning in his life. He started to attend a small church, ended up spending 3 years in a Hope Mission and through their care started to establish his life.

A number of years later when he was asked to preach in the small church someone saw the call of God on his life and 2 businesses's made sure he made it through his studies to be a pastor. As you can imagine I left out details that only he should tell, but I was struck with the wonder of our faith, the wonder of God's care in our lives, and the wonder of the stories which this room represents of how Jesus who made a choice on the Mt. of Olives to walk toward the horrors of Calvary, keeps on changing our lives today. This pastor's life, my life, your life, and for that I am so thankful.

4. I Am ... thankful for how Jesus' actions affect us Eternally

Let me tell you a story about how this works, it is a story called 'The Trial'. The story goes like this.

After living what I felt was a 'decent' life, my time on earth came to a close. I remember being in the hospital, feeling my spirit leave my body and then, the first thing I remember was sitting on a bench in the waiting room of what I thought was a court house. The doors opened and I was instructed to come in and have a seat by the defense table. As I looked around I saw the prosecutor, he was a villainous looking gent who snarled as he stared at me, he definitely was the most evil person I had ever seen. I sat down and looked to my left and there sat my lawyer, a kind gentle man whose appearance seemed vaguely familiar.

The corner door opened and there appeared the judge in his full flowing robes. He commanded an awesome presence as he moved across the room, so much so that I just couldn't take my eyes off of him. As he took his seat behind the bench he said *"Let's begin."*

The prosecutor rose and said *"Today, I will show you why this man deserves to go to hell."* Then with uncanny accuracy he began to tell about lies I had told, about how I had slandered another person with my gossip, how I had done things, thought things and cheated others. As he talked I felt my breath starting to come in short sharp gasps. I wondered how he, how anyone could know such private, hidden details about my life. Then as he proceeded he said *"My name is Satan and so I know as I list the following detail, they are absolutely true."* I was so embarrassed as he continued to tell things I was so ashamed about. I felt myself sinking lower and lower into my chair. I was so embarrassed I couldn't look at anyone in the room, not even my lawyer.

I then found out that although I was devastated with what the devil was saying, I was almost more upset at the lawyer who sat beside me. He just sat silently listening, not objecting, not interrupting, not even offering any form of defense on my part. Although I knew I was guilty of everything Satan was saying, I thought my defense should have at least mentioned a few of the good things I had done. Instead he just sat there silently, without a word.

Finally, Satan finished with a grin and said *"This man belongs in hell, he is guilty of all that I have charged him with and there is not a person who can prove otherwise, he deserves eternity in Hell."*

By the time my Lawyer rose, I had no doubt that I stood a chance of acquittal. Then my lawyer did a strange thing, he asked if he could approach the Judge's bench. The judge allowed it over the loud objections of Satan and beckoned him to come forward. As he started walking forward I was able to finally see him for who he was, all full of his glory. It was then that I realized why he looked so familiar, it was Jesus, my Lord and Savior was representing me.

He stopped at the bench and softly said *"Hi Dad"* and then he turned to address the court. He said *"Satan was correct in saying that this man has sinned, I won't deny any of these allegations. And yes the wages of sin is death and eternal punishment."* Then he took a deep breath, turned to his Father, stretched out his nail scared hands and said *"However, I died on the cross so that this person might have eternal life, so that every sin which Satan rightly said this person committed could be forgiven. What you need to know is that this man has accepted me as his personal Savior, so he is mine and those sins are forgiven, they no longer exist and Satan, you know you can't find them anywhere you can."* Then he continued *"Dave's name is written in the Lamb's book of Life and no one can snatch them out of my hands."* As Jesus sat down, he quietly paused, looked at his Father and said *"How can he be charged for something I have already paid for? I've done it all."*

The Judge lifted his mighty hand and slammed down the gavel and from his lips came these words *"He who the son sets free is free indeed, the penalty for him has been paid in full, case dismissed."*

I asked Jesus as he gave me instructions where to go next *"Have you ever lost a case?"* Jesus turned to me and smiled *"Everyone that has come to me and asks me to represent them has received the same verdict as you, Not Guilty, for the cost of all they have ever done has been paid in full." And for that I am Eternally Grateful.*

Without sounding too narrow I want to say I Am Glad for what we do together at Brentview. But so much more than that, I want to say 'I AM Thankful that with the entire struggle's on the MT. of Olives that Jesus chose to walk all the way to the cross. For in doing that he gained the power to keep changing lives, as he did in the life of the Pastor whose story I told. I am eternally grateful that Jesus will be my Advocate in eternity.