

IJAW DAY THANKSGIVING

THE HEART AND ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

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*“O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good: for His mercy endureth forever.”
(Psalm 107:1)*

I have been opportuned to see the expanse of the Niger Delta by reason of my numerous travels around the coastal region. During my primary and secondary school days, I joined my father, a trader in smoked fish to the various fishing settlements then. We would sail on different high seas, which are tributaries of the Atlantic Ocean, in a local house boat. I became very familiar with Rivers Sombrero, San Barbara and San Bartholomew. Afterwards, when I went full time to serve the Lord, as Director of Field Operations under Apostle G. D. Numbere, we took our Gospel crusades to the nooks and crannies of Ijaw land. This practice, I continued, even after the Lord moved me to my ministry, Living Gospel Missions International. We went from Akassa to Amassoma, from Buguma to Bonny, from Okrika to Oloibiri, from Abonnema to Agudama-Ekpetiama, from Sagbama to Egbematoru, from Opume to Nembe, from Otuokpoti to Brass. Others include the Ogoni land, the Yenagoa and the Epie axis, the Andoni axis, the Opobo axis, Kaiama, Opokuma, Bakana, Sabagreia, Tombia, Abua, Odi, Premabiri, Agbere, Trofani, then Delta, Edo, Akwa Ibom, Cross River States, etc.

In all of these places, I see one common thread running through them, which is, water (rivers); meaning life! From elementary African Geography, it is commonly said, “No Nile, no Egypt.” So also it could be said of Nigeria, “No Niger Delta, no Nigeria.” In His timeless plan, God has strategically located us here to bring life to this great nation. We produce life and wealth. Our wealth is not limited to crude oil – it is only a fraction of it. We have the sea food which is rich in all healthy compositions. The Omega 3, which is a much sought after food supplement for heart health is one of such products. When ailing people visit the hospitals, their diet is usually changed to mostly fish, fruits and vegetables. Coral beads and pearls are also part of the resources of the sea. Whichever way you look at it, the Ijaw land is a giver of life – as endowed by

its Creator. The Psalmist said, *“Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases.”* (Psalm 103:1-3)

In view of the foregoing, let us give God thanks. For the gift of life, let us thank Him. *“The dead praise not the LORD, neither any that go down into silence.”* (Psalm 115:17) There were people who would want to give anything to experience this day but cannot because they were cut off from the earth. For good health, let us give Him thanks. For our education, let us give Him thanks. Let us thank Him for our lifting and promotion, for our husbands, wives and children. For our occupation, our trade and our various businesses, let us express our gratitude to Almighty God. Some of us have gone through painful or unpleasant experiences in life but God brought us out of them. If He didn't, we will not be alive to tell the story. The good thing is that, we came out of them. Such experiences are what the Bible refers to as the ‘valley of the shadow of death’ as eloquently expressed in the twenty-third Psalm: *“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.”* Furthermore, *“He brought me up also out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And He put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord.”* (Psalm 40:1-3)

Today, we have an Ijaw son, occupying the highest office in Nigeria, the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, His Excellency, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, GCFR, who on assumption of office, wasted no time in taking care of the hydra-headed plague, fuel scarcity, that had bedeviled Nigerians for so long. That, definitely, is a sure sign of better things to come. We also thank the Lord for the appointment of Ijaw sons and daughters into prominent positions in the governance of this great nation. God Himself arranged and re-arranged things in the Nigerian polity to bring about this miracle for which we are grateful.

The God of heaven is our source; He is our life. *“In Him we live, and move, and have our being”* (Acts 17:28) We appreciate the fact that this world is full of challenges, problems, trials and temptations. Being overwhelmed with such predicaments, we sometimes, go astray from our Maker to seek help, power and

protection elsewhere. But even when we go astray, our God is always ready and willing to receive and forgive us when we return to Him in repentance. That is why He is different from other gods which are no God. Those lesser deities do not have mercy or forgiveness in their vocabulary. In Romans 5:8, the Bible says, *“God commendeth His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”* In Isaiah 55:6-7, God says, *“Seek the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake His way, and the unrighteous man His thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God for He will abundantly pardon.”*

Nobody wants to have dealings with an ingrate, not even God! Jesus cleansed 10 lepers but only one remembered to go back to give the Lord thanks. Whereas Jesus appreciated this man’s show of gratitude, He asked, “Were there not ten cleansed, but where are the nine?” (Luke 17:12-19). Jesus gave this former leprous man an additional blessing by making him whole because the man went back to Jesus to show appreciation. When we thank the Lord for what He has done, we provoke Him to do more. Mary Magdalene, out of whom Jesus cast seven devils spent the rest of her life serving the Lord and supporting Jesus’ ministry with her resources. (Luke 8:1-3) Hannah Elkannah, Prophet Samuel’s mother, showed her appreciation to God by not only singing His praise but also gave her son to the work of God. Mary, the mother of Jesus, sang the ‘Magnificat’ (Luke 1:46-55) as an expression of gratitude to the Lord. A careful look at the scripture will reveal that the parents of Jesus were not rich people. But for the gift of a child, they had to offer a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons as a practical demonstration of gratitude to God. Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha, poured the costly ointment on Jesus from a grateful heart and a show of devotion. (John 12:3)

It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High: To shew forth Thy loving kindness in the morning, and Thy faithfulness every night, upon an instrument of ten strings, and upon the psaltery; upon the harp with a solemn sound. For thou, LORD, hast made me glad through Thy work: I will triumph in the works of Thy hands. O LORD, how great are Thy works! And Thy thoughts are very deep (Psalm 92:1-5).

In the book of Romans, the Lord takes time to explain what befalls those who are ungrateful.

*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. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. (Rom. 1:21-27)*

Let us inculcate the attitude of thanksgiving and develop the heart of gratitude in our lives. Before asking for more, let us give thanks for what we've already got. The Psalmist is a good example of this, when he commanded his soul to bless the Lord and **“forget not all His benefits....”** (Psalm 103:1-3) Dearly beloved, that is why we are gathered here today to thank our heavenly Father for all that He has done for us. Let us not get stuck on those things that we are yet to receive but concentrate on what He has done. May we also extend this same culture of thankfulness to our everyday life as we interact with our neighbours and friends, spouses, leaders, parents and children. *“O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good: for His mercy endureth forever.” (Psalm 107:1)*