

## **GIVING THANKS IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES**

Thanksgiving-Homecoming Service, Sunday Evening November 23, 2014, MCC Chapel

### **I. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**

A. What I'm about to read may be one of the shortest, most potent, three-verse exhortations, in the whole Bible. Paul is writing to the church in Thessalonica, a persecuted body of believers. They're oppressed and living under the threat of imprisonment and death. Many in this church were former pagans. They've seen some of their own fellow believers laid to rest and they're concerned they might not see their loved ones again. It's not a rosy picture and Paul's letter comes none too soon. These verses are quite challenging but they're also powerful, alive, and as relevant as ever...

B. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 *"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."* (ESV)

C. The past 8 days or so have brought a lot of sad and difficult stories to many of us. Diagnoses of cancer, infections, massive heart attacks, death of loved ones, and lives displaced by tragedies. News on the international front has also been full of epidemics, tragedies, and atrocities. (Listen again to 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18...)

D. Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is asking us to rejoice, maintain a constant attitude of prayerfulness, while sustaining thankful hearts in all circumstances. How & Why? Because the circumstances themselves are smaller than the Source of our joy, the Object for our prayers, and the Reason for our thanksgiving. If they're not, obeying this admonition is futile...

E. With Thanksgiving this coming Thursday, how do we give Thanks to God in the midst of such tough circumstances? The Pilgrims did that in 1621 (47 out of 102 died that first year; "7 times more graves than huts." wrote Westermayer). And Christians for 2,000 years, many suffering horrendously, have done this. Believers suffering persecution in some 60 nations are doing this... How about us--how do we give thanks in all our circumstances? Consider the following:

- 1) We were once dead in our trespasses and sins but have been raised to new life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- 2) We were once lost but now we're found; once blind but now we can see.
- 3) We were once guilty but have been justified-declared not guilty-forgiven.
- 4) We were once afflicted with sin but by His stripes we were healed.
- 5) We were once under wrath but now under grace, objects of God's love.
- 6) We were once God's enemies but we've been made His friends.
- 7) We were once spiritual orphans but God's made us His children.
- 8) We once faced two deaths but now we just face one and then eternal life.

F. John Bunyan said: *"A sensible thanksgiving for mercies received is a mighty prayer in the Spirit of God. It prevails with Him unspeakably."* Despite our circumstances, our troubles, trials, and tribulations, we can still give Thanks because God has changed our positions and our destinies while giving us a sense of mission for our brief time here on terra firma...

G. Many people live as though life now is all there is. e.g. Ask people how they're doing and they say things like, *'It could be worse!' or 'It's better than the alternative!' 'I could be pushing up tomatoes!'* But 2 Corinthians 4:13-18 is our better perspective. With these words we go forward (perhaps limping in the natural and the spiritual) yet with thanksgiving, rejoicing, and prayer as we pursue a far more glorious outcome...

\* Close with 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 and Prayer...

### **Scriptures, Videos, & Bonus Stuff**

#### **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (ESV)**

**16** Rejoice always, **17** pray without ceasing, **18** give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

#### **2 Corinthians 4:13-18 (NET)**

**13** But since we have the same spirit of faith as that shown in what has been written, *"I believed; therefore I spoke,"* we also believe, therefore we also speak. **14** We do so because we know that the one who raised up Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus and will bring us with you into His presence. **15** For all these things are for your sake, so that the grace that is including more and more people may cause thanksgiving to increase to the glory of God. **16** Therefore we do not despair, but even if our physical body is wearing away, our inner person is being renewed day by day. **17** For our momentary, light suffering is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all

comparison **18** because we are not looking at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen. For what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

#### **Quote by John Bunyan**

"A sensible thanksgiving for mercies received is a mighty prayer in the Spirit of God. It prevails with Him unspeakably."

#### **Film Clips & Other Links**

##### **Christian Gratitude - John Piper**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-mnidQuLZ1Y>

##### **Thanksgiving Medley**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x3dXCL34aEA>

##### **"All That I Can Do" - Ted Sandquist, Nedra Ross, & Phil Keaggy**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4kefjB1HZ2c>

#### **Bonus Stuff**

##### **Psalm 118:1 (Amplified)**

1 O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; for His mercy and loving-kindness endure forever!

##### **Colossians 2:6-7 (ESV)**

6 Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, 7 rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

#### **Quote by John Wesley**

"I preached on the righteousness of the law and the righteousness of faith. While I was speaking, several dropped down as dead and among the rest such a cry was heard of sinners groaning for the righteousness of faith that it almost drowned my voice. But many of these soon lifted up their heads with joy and broke out into thanksgiving, being assured they now had the desire of their soul - the forgiveness of their sins."

#### **Quote by Isaac Watts**

"How divinely full of glory and pleasure shall that hour be when all the millions of mankind that have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb of God shall meet together and stand around Him, with every tongue and every heart full of joy and praise! How astonishing will be the glory and the joy of that day when all the saints shall join together in one common song of gratitude and love, and of everlasting thankfulness to this Redeemer! With that unknown delight, and inexpressible satisfaction, shall all that are saved from the ruins of sin and hell address the Lamb that was slain, and rejoice in His presence!"

#### **Quote by Jerry Bridges**

"Thankfulness to God is a recognition that God in His goodness and faithfulness has provided for us and cared for us, both physically and spiritually. It is a recognition that we are totally dependent upon Him; that all that we are and have comes from God."

#### **Quote by A.W. Pink**

"Yes, give thanks for "all things" for, as it has been well said "Our disappointments are but His appointments."

#### **Quote by H.U. Westermayer**

"The Pilgrims made seven times more graves than huts. No Americans have been more impoverished than these who, nevertheless, set aside a day of thanksgiving."

#### **Quote by Charles H. Spurgeon**

"I have heard of some good old woman in a cottage, who had nothing but a piece of bread and a little water, and lifting up her hands, she said, as a blessing, "What! all this, and Christ too?"

#### **Erma Bombeck on Feeling Grateful**

An estimated 1.5 million people are living today after bouts with breast cancer. Every time I forget to feel grateful to be among them, I hear the voice of an eight-year-old named Christina, who had cancer of the nervous system. When asked what she wanted for her birthday, she thought long and hard and finally said, "I don't know. I have two sticker books and a Cabbage Patch doll. I have everything!" The kid is right.

- Erma Bombeck, *Redbook*, October Edition, 1992.