

It's been a hard year: pandemic (human toll), policy (social, ecclesiastical), politics (all annoyed, some alarmed). CBC's "Thanksgiving Eve" service: not this year. Many families unable to gather Thursday. Gratitude may wane.

Sermon text esp. suitable. Our text is short enough to be the summary:

*In every thing give thanks:  
for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.*

All Christians on earth suffer. The Thessalonians had "much affliction" (1.6). Paul was "shamefully mistreated" (2.2). Churches in Judea were also persecuted (2.14-16). All believers are "appointed to" such "afflictions" (3.3), even "tribulation" (3.4) and "distress" (3.7). They needed comforting words (4.18) to turn away hopeless sorrow (4.13). They were in danger of disunity and disaffection toward pastors (5.12, 13). Some among them were "unruly, feeble-minded, and weak" (5.14). In every time, place, and circumstance, something always works against gratitude.

I. Comprehensive Thanksgiving (18a)

- A. The act, "give thanks" (imperative verb), to joyfully acknowledge God as the Giver of every blessing (Jas 1.17), ourselves as unworthy receivers. Typically verbal (e.g., 1.2; 2.13). Actually saying thanks to God with much joy and gratitude is a Christian duty and urge. "Praise the Lord" should fall from our lips readily and frequently.
- B. The occasions, "in every thing." Single word in Gk. = "pert. to totality with focus on its individual components, *each, every*" (BDAG) so AV trans. is *very good* here! "In all circumstances" (ESV) not as good. In each and every thing, in everything without exception, give thanks. Yet not to deny the badness of bad things, but to praise God that even these are His wise dealings for our good (Rom 8.28). "We glory in tribulations also," because tribulation → patience → experience → hope → ultimate salvation (Rom 5.3-5). "Paul's point is that we should have the attitudes of joy and thanks in response to whatever ups and downs we face. He has in mind a continual attitude of being aware of God's presence. Such an awareness will result in our ability to rejoice in whatever good or difficult things cross our paths under God's sovereign hand, to thank God for all these things" (Beale, in loc.).

II. Christian Thanksgiving (18b). 18a supported and described in 18b (do 18a because of 18b, and do 18a in the manner of 18b). Only 18b can be 18a, and 18b is the reason for 18a.

- A. The revelation (prophetic not natural) of God's will. Even the heathen without Scripture are condemned for ingratitude toward God (Rom 1.21). "The will of God" in Scripture in a figurative way (not *properly*). In the proper sense, God's will is one and irresistible (His decree). Yet Scripture speaks about God's

commands as His "will" anthropomorphically, as a human king's desire/will is revealed by his commands, which yet may be disobeyed to the king's frustration. Not so with the sovereign, omnipotent God! Yet He indeed commands His worship (Exod 34.14) and part of this is joyfully thanking Him (1 Chron 16.8). This remains a required ministry of the NC community (Heb 13.15).

- B. The realm of this ministry, "in Christ Jesus," a spiritual realm. NT shorthand for true Christian identity. It is only "in [union] with Christ Jesus" that we are acceptable to God (Eph 1.6), that we are spiritually alive unto God (2 Tim 1.1), and that we can do anything good (John 15.5). On Thanksgiving Day, whatever prayers and thanks are made around bountiful tables, only those that arise from people who are "in Christ Jesus" are acceptable to God. Of all religious gatherings, only those "in Christ" offer true worship.
- C. The redeemed people offering it, "concerning you" (plural). Individual thanksgiving is good; corporate is better. The churches of believers are composed of saved individuals for whom Christ died, AND Christ died for "the church" (Eph 5.25-27). The holy, spotless, wrinkle-free, blemish-free body of believers with perfect unity offering up perpetual, blameless, eternal praise to God for His abounding mercies to us in Christ has always been the aim and purpose of God and Christ.

Conclusion: Let us be most grateful to God for this clear revelation of His will for us! Let us examine ourselves individually and as a church, confessing our sins of ungratefulness and renewing our commitment to saying thanks very heartily to God, both individually and together.

- ➔ Yes, it's been a hard year, but our thankful praise to God should not decrease!
- ➔ Yes, it's been a hard year, but we still have all the same spiritual reasons as ever to rejoice in the Lord always, so rejoice!
- ➔ Yes, it's been a hard year, but as sinners we only deserve hell, and we remain unworthy of the least of His mercies. The more we realize this, the more thankful we'll be even for common blessings.

I have read of a holy man, that was seen once standing still with tears in his eyes, and looking up to heaven; and being asked, by one that passed by, why he did so, said, "I admire the Lord's mercy to me that did not make me a toad;" that vermin being then casually at his feet. *The least common mercy affects a gracious soul that knows his desert to be nothing but misery.* --William Cooper in "Puritan Sermons (1659-1689)."

So join me in saying, "Praise the Lord!" Say it with all your heart. "Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!" We are His beloved sons and daughters in Christ, and the best is yet to come! Eternal thanks to our great Savior! Ω