

With Thanks and Trust

Life Changing Questions

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We're addressing a question that we framed a couple of weeks ago, a question that we believe can help one pursue his sanctification in the Christian life, and it's a question that we can ask ourselves at any point, in any situation, at any time, and orient our thinking in the right direction and it's a question that could be framed in a lot of different ways, "How can I glorify God," things like that, but we framed it in this way, "How can I be righteous here?" How can I be righteous here and we're calling that the question that can change your life because it has a way of orienting you toward everything that is important and everything that you should be pursuing in the Christian life. And there's a method to our madness even though it may not be evident to many in what we're doing. The first thing that we wanted to do was to establish the fact that this matter of righteousness is a priority in the Christian life. Jesus said in Matthew 6:33 to "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you," and so it's a priority, this developing righteousness is a priority.

Back in the book of Titus, if you want to turn there just by way of a little bit of review here, in Titus 2 it says that the grace of God has appeared in verse 11, "the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age." True biblical salvation produces a life that is oriented toward biblical righteousness.

And then last week we tried to define what that righteousness is, what it looks like, what it's centered on because it's easy for people to talk about righteousness and turn to external behavior and rules and regulations and we said that that wasn't what we're talking about at all. This righteousness is a heart-centered matter, it's a matter of affections and a disposition toward life and attitudes as you go through life, and we looked at Scriptures to support that, and that it's a disposition that is centered on the Lord Jesus. We looked at Philippians 3 where Paul said that his desire was to be found in Christ, not having a righteousness of his own derived from the law but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith. Justification receives a righteousness alien to ourselves that we receive by faith. It is the very righteousness of Christ that is imputed to our account and gives us a right standing

with God, and Paul said as he continued on in that sentence, he says, "I want to be found in Him so that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings being conformed to His death." This focus on Christ led to his desire to know him and to grow in him. So this priority of righteousness conditions us to think about the attitudes and dispositions of our heart and it tells us that we need to focus on Christ.

Now we've been very careful to emphasize during this time that we are not talking about how someone enters into salvation. We do not act righteously in order to obtain salvation from God. God saves us and then righteousness flows from that. Salvation is by grace through faith alone, not as a result of any works that we have done, and yet Ephesians 2:10 goes on to say that "we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand." And so this life that God has given to us is meant to be a life where we live things out in a manner of righteousness that is pleasing to him. It's about attitudes before it is about actions and we have laid the foundation for that.

Well, tonight what I want to do is, you know, we've kind of been working from the outside in, the priority of righteousness, the realm of righteousness in the believing heart, and now we want to talk about what it is in the heart that we are trying to cultivate and there's a lot of ways that we could go. I am not at all trying to be exhaustive here this evening, I just want to give you two primary dispositions of the heart for you to consider and to build upon as you seek to grow in Christ and to answer the question how can I be righteous here.

What would righteousness look like in the circumstances in which you find yourselves here this evening? Well, we're only going to look at two but they are attitudes which have a way of informing everything else, that frame your disposition toward everything else, and we could say that it's a thankful heart and a trusting heart. A thankful heart, first of all, and a trusting heart, second of all, and those are vertical dispositions toward God, you might say. These are not attitudes that we have so much toward men, although we manifest them in our lives and others observe them, but these are attitudes of righteousness toward the God who saved us. How would you righteously respond to the God who saved you? Well, you would be, if you're thinking biblically and thinking rightly, you would be thankful toward him and you would trust him. These are vertical attitudes of which we speak here this evening.

So let's look, first of all, at a thankful heart. In some ways, we're talking about Christian Living 101 here. This is basic but we need the basics a lot of times to be reinforced to us. Let's think about it from this perspective, beloved: if Jesus Christ has genuinely saved you from your sin and he has genuinely saved you from eternal judgment and damnation in hell, if he has really and truly done that for you, then your whole life should be framed with a settled attitude of thanksgiving toward him, an attitude of gratitude that never loses sight of your guilt and shame and sin before a holy God, that never loses sight that the outcome of those things and the just thing, in one sense, for God to have done would have been to condemn you eternally, when you understand that, first of all, and then you recognize that Christ has saved you and delivered you and rescued you from that

judgment and that damnation and that eternal destiny, when you recognize all of that, the only possible, the only possible response that you could have is to be thankful to him for that, right? How could you have any other settled overarching disposition to the one who did that for you at the cost of his own blood and at the cost of his own life? I continually go back in my mind to what Jesus said in John 10 in thinking about his atonement and his death on the cross, and he said that he voluntarily lays down his life for us. No one has taken it away from him, he lays it down on his own initiative. Not because we could compel him. Not because we deserve that. We were undeserving and in that condition Christ loved us and did all of those things for us.

Now beloved, if that doesn't frame your entire attitude toward life and eternity, you need to spend some more time meditating on the significance of what that means, and to lay aside the issues of the day, the issues of life, the problems and all of that and just meditate on who Christ is, the eternal Son of God, what he did, he died an atoning death for your sins, and what the consequences of that are. This has radically, immeasurably, geometrically changed the reality of your eternal destiny and we need to just stop and let that sink in for a moment and let that transcend and transform all of the other things that we tend to occupy ourselves with. You see, it's a vertical attitude that says, "Lord, I realize what You've done. I realize something of it. I see it in Scripture. I know I don't know the full extent of what it cost You and what Your sufferings were like and what heaven's going to be. I don't know it fully and exhaustively but I know it in part, I know it truly, and I know that what that means is that You have given me at Your own cost an immeasurably great gift that I could never have gotten on my own, and so what can I do but say thank You and let that be the shape of everything else that I proceed in life with."

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 says, "Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks," hear that again, "in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." Do you see the simplicity of those words calling us to a comprehensive approach toward life. In everything, in every season of life, in sorrow and in joy, in poverty and in plenty, in all of those circumstances have a disposition of thankfulness and gratitude toward God. This is what he wants from you. This is his revealed will for you. This is his command to us and when we are mindful of who Christ is to us and what he has done for us, then that command is not a burdensome thing, it is a natural overflow of a heart that's been transformed by grace. It could be no other way.

So let's drill down just a little bit further. What exactly does it mean to give thanks? You know, it's easy to just kind of toss around terms and not really give much thought to what they signify. What does it mean to give thanks? Well, not trying to be technical here, just to say this is that you express gratitude to God because Jesus Christ has given more to you than your sins deserve. Your sins deserve judgment. Christ acted on your behalf while you were still helpless, while you were dead in your trespasses and sins, Christ died for you, Christ rose for you, Christ ascended to heaven for you, Christ sent the Spirit upon you to give you new life. In all of your deadness, Christ did all of that as a gracious gift from a most worthy giver to a most unworthy recipient. And so you recognize that and you express your gratitude toward him. You think seriously and long and hard about the nature of his grace and you thank him for what he has done. "Lord, thank You. Thank

You. I am grateful. I recognize Your generosity toward me. I appreciate what You have done." You get the idea. Psalm 97:12 says this, "Be glad in the LORD, you righteous ones, And give thanks to His holy name." Okay? So you get the idea.

What I want to do in the next part here as we consider this thankful heart, I want to press upon you and expose you to the various areas of the Christian life where thanksgiving is found to be a direct result or right at the center of everything that it's supposed to be. You see, it's not simply one text from 1 Thessalonians 5, in everything give thanks, when you read certain passages of Scripture, you see that this is built-in to the very woof and warp and the fabric of what it means to be a Christian, and every important aspect of biblical spiritual life finds thanksgiving attached to it.

So turn to the book of Ephesians with me for a moment. We're just going to number these things off. I'm just going to go through these things very quickly. I think there's five that I'm about to show to you. Giving thanks, number 1, giving thanks is part of the Spirit-filled life. It is part of being filled with the Spirit. It is a result of being filled with the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians 5:18 which is easy to remember because it parallels 1 Thessalonians 5:18, that's an easy way for us to start to stitch some of these themes in Scripture together so that we remember them more easily. Ephesians 5:18. Watch this. You know about the command to be filled with the Spirit. Verse 18, "do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit." And what are the results, what are the consequences of being filled with the Holy Spirit, of being filled with the word of God? Well, there are consequences. You end up "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord." Look at it there in verse 20, "always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father." Always. This is a settle life disposition. For all things. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. In every circumstance, at all times there is to be this attitude of thanksgiving, of gratitude toward God for Christ and what he has done for you. That is what the Spirit of God produces. That's one of the fruit of the Spirit that he produces in us, is this thankful heart, this thankful attitude vertically directed toward God and his Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now I can imagine someone, not anyone in this room but I could imagine someone claiming to be a Christian and saying, "Well, I'm not, I'm not a thankful person and I'm filled with the Spirit." Well, no, no, it doesn't work that way. It doesn't work that way. You don't exempt yourself from this. The fact perhaps that you're not a thankful person and not marked by that is perhaps more likely, far more likely an indication that you're just not filled with the Spirit. I'm not saying that you're not a Christian but carnal thinking and carnal minds and carnal lives lose sight of this element of thanksgiving. The one who is submitted to God, who's filled with his word, filled with his Spirit finds himself filled with thanksgiving. That's what the Spirit produces. You see, a thankful attitude toward God glorifies Christ. A thankful attitude toward Christ honors him and the ministry of the Holy Spirit is to give glory to Jesus Christ. Jesus speaks about that in the Gospel of John.

So the Spirit produces this giving of thanks, and as a result of that, we see how a thankful heart is central to a righteous life. But there's more. Secondly, we could say, this is kind

of a second sub point here is that the Bible describes giving thanks as part of the worthy Christian walk. Giving thanks is part of the worthy Christian walk and for that I want to turn now to the book of Colossians and just go through some passages in Colossians which, as you know, is kind of a parallel text to the book of Ephesians so you find similar themes there, similar structure. In Colossians 1:9 Paul reports to the Colossians how he is praying for them and what a blessing for a church to have a spiritual leader like Paul who prays for them. In Colossians 1:9 Paul says, "For this reason also, since the day we heard of it," he had heard of their faith, verse 4, in Christ Jesus, "the love which we have for all the saints." He had heard about this and now he says, "since the day we heard of it," what has he been doing? Verse 9, "we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with all the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord." This is an apostle praying for a true church that they would walk in a manner that is worthy of the Lord who saved them.

Well, what does that worthy walk look like? "To please Him in all respects," he goes on in verse 10. Well, what is it that pleases God? "Bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light." Paul builds up his prayer to this great climax. He says, "I pray that you would walk in a manner worthy of Him, to please Him." Well, what is it that pleases him? That you're strengthened with his power, with his might. And what does that produce? It produces this life of giving thanks to the Father, this vertical dimension of gratitude. So a walk that is worthy of the Lord is a life of giving thanks. To phrase the question in a different way, how can I be righteous here is the same question as saying how can I walk in a manner that is worthy of the Lord, well, what I want you to see is that the culmination of Paul's prayer is that it would produce a thankful people in response to the work of Jesus Christ.

So a worthy walk is marked by thanksgiving. But there's more. There's more and I don't want you to lose sight of what we're doing here. We've made the assertion that a thankful heart is central to a righteous life in the Christian walk, and what we're doing is we're showing you multiple passages of Scripture that reinforce that theme, looking at it from different perspectives, and that thanksgiving is found in the heart of these matters. And so we've seen that it's part of the Spirit-filled life, Ephesians 5. It's part of a worthy walk, Colossians 1. But there's more, number 3, giving thanks is the mark of a mature faith in Christ. A mature faith in Christ. Colossians 2, beginning in verse 6. Colossians 2:6-7, he says, "Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord," you see, they are true Christians, "so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith." Alright, so he says, "Now that you are in Christ, I want you to grow up. I want you to mature. I want you to be built up and established in your faith." Well, what happens in an established faith? Well, "just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude." Overflowing with gratitude, that this just, this just spills out, this just bubbles out like an ever-flowing spring in the woods someplace, always bubbling out, bringing forth the clear clean water of gratitude toward the Christ who saved you. And so you see Paul speaking about calling them to a maturity of faith and the outcome of that maturity is marked by gratitude.

So a mature faith in Christ is known, is recognized by one who gives thanks. But there's more. There's more still. Fourthly, giving thanks flows from the word of God. It flows from meditating on the word of God, understanding it, considering it, thinking about it, applying it to your life, growing in it, asking questions that you might expand your knowledge and understanding still more. Wanting to grow in obedience not simply in head knowledge because the Bible says that knowledge makes arrogant, knowledge on its own simply makes a man arrogant, even if it's spiritual knowledge, but love edifies.

Well, Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs," this is paralleling obviously Ephesians 5, and look at what he says, "singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him," through Christ, that is, "to God the Father." And again, beloved, what I want you to see is that this is utterly comprehensive. There is no aspect of life that is outside of this. Whatever you do in word or deed, whatever you say, whatever you're doing, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

And so I hope that you're beginning to see how utterly comprehensive this is. This is not an obscure theme in the New Testament. This is written all over the pages of the very nature of what Christian living is supposed to be like. If we are Christians, God intends for us to be thankful people. We develop that gratitude by remembering our Lord, remembering his death and resurrection on our behalf, remembering his presence with us always even to the end of the age, remembering that he is guiding our life into an eternal state of utter perfect bliss and blessedness. I just want to ask you how could anyone know those things and not be thankful? This is inescapable, isn't it?

So we've seen that this gratitude is the mark of a Spirit-filled life, a worthy walk, a mature faith, it flows from the word of God. But there's still more. Number 5. There's still more where Scripture is emphasizing this theme. Giving thanks is central to a prayerful life, a meaningful prayer life is found with an attitude of thanksgiving. Colossians 4:2 where the apostle says, "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of," surprise, "thanksgiving," and he goes on and adds a personal request in the midst of his prayer and his call for them to pray. But, you know, you think about the spiritual disciplines, the disciplines of grace, you know, of Bible reading and prayer, and we see condensed in this passage right together wrapped around the word of God, wrapped around prayer is this theme, this transcendent theme of thanksgiving. I hope that you're beginning to see how impossible it is to live a meaningful Christian life without this spirit of thanksgiving being central to it all.

Turn back one book to the book of Philippians, Philippians 4:6 and 7. I really do intend for us to get back to Philippians one day, one day soon, but in Philippians 4, remember that we had said Paul had said in chapter 3, verse 10, "I want to know Him, the power of His resurrection." Flowing out of that a few verses later, Philippians 4:6, he says, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let

your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Once again you see the theme of thanksgiving and once again, beloved, you see it in a comprehensive call and description about life. Be anxious for nothing but in everything, by contrast, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

And so, beloved, we come to this unmistakable conclusion, this unavoidable reality about the nature of the Christian life: a thankful heart is a central mark of New Testament salvation. You cannot avoid that conclusion. Logically, you realize what Christ has done, of course you're going to be grateful to him, you see the work of the Holy Spirit and what he produces in the heart is this thankful heart toward Christ, toward God, and you see in these multiple passages and I've only taken you to two or three New Testament books, we could have multiplied this, it was just easy because Colossians, you can just roll through it so many times in Colossians, a thankful heart is a key mark of New Testament salvation. You thank Christ for his redemptive death on the cross. You thank him for his resurrection and his ascension. You thank him for the gift of imputed righteousness. You thank him for the forgiveness of sin. You thank him for the life he has given to you and the security of your salvation. You thank him for the hope of heaven that certainly lies ahead. You thank him for his presence with you always even to the end of the age, the Good Shepherd so that "I fear no evil for You are with me even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death," Psalm 23. You thank him for the word of God, that treasure that is a lamp unto our feet and a light to our path. You thank him for the indwelling Holy Spirit. You thank him that he'll finish the work that he's begun, Philippians 1:6. And on and on it goes.

You see that this is a gushing, ever-flowing fountain. There are always eternal, abundant, unending reasons for you to be grateful to Christ and we should never lose sight of that and Scripture tells us not to, in everything give thanks. You know, I mean, sometimes the job of a preacher is pretty easy. You know, this is not complicated. I haven't quoted to you, have I, I haven't quoted to you a single technical Greek term, I haven't used any technical theological language that you're not already familiar with. We're just reading basic simple Scripture and seeing what the word of God has to say for it. And beloved, I mean, all of this is before we even get to the material and relational blessings in earthly life. Thank you for my loving family and my loving friends, and thank you for the way that you've provided for us. And thank you for good health and thank you for strength when I'm not healthy. And thank you... Oh, you just go on and you get lost in it. You enter into this and you realize that it's like walking into, in a positive way, it's like walking into one of those great mazes that they make with bushes and things like that and you get into it and you realize, "I can't find my way out of here. Everywhere I look there is another reason to give thanks. I can't escape from it nor do I want to. I'm so glad to give thanks to my Savior. Everywhere I look, to my left, to my right, ahead, behind, above, below, in the past, in the present, in the future, unending reasons to ascribe praise and thanksgiving to my Lord Jesus Christ." This is what righteousness looks like.

So what I want you to see when we talk about how can I be righteous here, do you see, you can't help but see, I trust the Spirit of God is always at work when the word of God is

rightly preached so I'm confident that the Spirit is helping you see this, do you see the great distinction between what we're talking about here tonight and a view of righteousness that talks about trying harder or, you know, what rules do I need to keep, or keeping a stiff upper lip. There's a total dynamic that is utterly different. This is not lifeless gratitude. This is not an unwilling compliance with external rules placed upon you. You are genuinely moved in the depth of your being with gratitude for such grace. Grace produces gratitude. If you want it to perfectly alliterate, grace generates gratitude without fail.

Now if that weren't enough as we consider this thankful heart that the Spirit of God produces in us and calls us to, let me give you a frightening contrast. Turn over to Romans 1. The preeminent importance that God puts on a thankful attitude is seen not only in these positive statements that we've seen throughout the pages of the New Testament, frighteningly, in my opinion, we see it in stark contrast from the negative side. What does God think of people who do not give him thanks? What is their position before the holy throne? Romans 1:18, "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." You see, we've been asking the question, "How can I be righteous here?" Well, let's flip it around and do something that will almost distort our minds as we do, but let's look at it from the unbeliever's perspective, "How can I be unrighteous here? What is the mark of an unrighteous, ungodly life?" Verse 19, "that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse." Verse 21, "For even though they knew God," God had made himself known, he has made himself known in the skies and in the Scripture and there is no excuse for anyone not to give honor to him. No excuse whatsoever. Verse 21, "even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks." They did not thank him in response to the revelation that was given to them. They turned their back on what they knew to be true. They refused to honor him. "They became futile in their speculations, their heart was darkened," and a bad downward spiral started from there which the rest of that chapter goes on to explain. They did not honor him as God or give thanks.

Scripture says very plainly that one of the marks of unbelieving people under the wrath of God is their lack of a thankful attitude toward the God that they know exists. Take that negative, lay it aside, all of the positive statements that are spoken of believers and their gratitude, you have a full picture given to you of the preeminent importance that God places on this heart attitude of thanksgiving.

And so step back and ask the question: are you thankful to God tonight? Let's make it easy. Let's say, just pick a number, two minutes in prayer returning thanks to God for the blessings that he has given to you, the blessings that you have in Christ. I'm only asking about two minutes. You know, we all know what it's like, "God, help me here. God, help me this. It's really bad. God, You've got to help me. God," you know, give me, give me, give me. Well, how about give him, give him, give him thanks as a disposition in prayer? It's convicting, isn't it? This is very convicting. Maybe we're not as far advanced in the

Christian life as we think we are, and I'm including myself. I'm genuinely using the first person plural here. Maybe we're not as far along in the Christian life as we think we are if that's true of us.

Now let me say this. We have a tendency to lose sight of what Christ has done for us and I'm not here to scold you tonight at all, that's not at all my point, that's not why I have said these things, simply to hold up before you the lofty nobility of what the Christian life looks like, of being a man or a woman so humbled by grace that your heart naturally reflexively gives thanks to God in every situation because you have never lost sight of the centrality of Christ in the meaning of your existence. And so if you've been ungrateful, you can confess your sin and return to this gratitude. As we say that, we're just, we're overwhelmed by another wave of reason for gratitude that we could recognizing all that we've forgotten, seeing all that Scripture calls us to in this thanksgiving, recognize the vast way that we fall short of living that out on a consistent basis, and that we can go before our Lord humbly, confess that to him, "Lord, I confess I have been so ungrateful. I have been so far removed from thanksgiving. Lord, forgive me. Change me. Use Your Spirit to stir these things up in me because that's what I want my life to be marked by, to see all of that, to be able to confess that and then to know that the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteous. To realize that we can go and confess that and He forgives us and cleanses and restores us and renews our joy, and what are you left with? Another reason to give Him thanks."

So a thankful heart is the mark of the righteousness that God calls us to but, you know, life is hard. What about the uncertainties of life when adversity comes, when questions arise, when family goes off in different directions than what you've prayed for, when death comes and the angel of death swoops near to those that you love? What then? And we realize we don't have all of the answers and we feel the pain of a broken heart when it seems that God is not answering our prayers. Oh, we're thankful but we're in the flesh and we see this tension and, "Lord, I still have to live here and, you know, there are these affections that I have in a human direction and I see things going off the rails. O God, what are we to do with that?"

Well, the question, the life question how can I be righteous here leads us to a crucial second point for tonight. Again, I'm not pretending to be exhaustive here, just suggestive in things that I think are more than enough to occupy us for many many months to come. We've said a thankful heart, secondly, a trusting heart. The righteous response to God, the God who has saved you, the righteous response to him is not only to thank him but to trust him. Righteousness inherently involves trusting him. What does it mean to trust him? To be confident in his ultimate goodness to you.

Look at Matthew 6 with me. Matthew 6, and we could read all the way from verse 25 and that would be a worthwhile endeavor if we did, but for the sake of time tonight we won't do that. Jesus is dealing with the issue of anxiety. Verse 25, "For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on." Verse 31, "Do not worry then, saying, 'What will

we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?'" Verse 34, "do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself." And so the whole context here is Jesus teaching about anxiety, calling us out of it and telling us how to overcome it. You know, it's interesting when you look at the totality of the Sermon on the Mount and the vast spiritual issues that Jesus addresses in those three chapters, the longest section that he gives, the most attention that he gives is to prayer and to anxiety and you can measure that out on your own when you have time someplace and you'll see that that statement is true. Anxiety is a very serious spiritual issue and so trusting God must be important to him.

Now let's look more specifically at verses 31 through 34. Let's just look at those for a moment. "Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." For tonight's message, what I want you to see is that Jesus says seek first his kingdom and his righteousness. He elevates this priority of righteousness to the utmost place of importance and he does that in the context of telling us not to be anxious but to trust God instead. And so righteousness, how can I be righteous here, you can't have a righteous heart without trusting the God who saved you, called you, and commands you to be this way.

Now think about it, what does anxiety say? At its core, at its root, we've said this many times in the past so I'm just going to state it briefly here, your anxiety is making a statement, it's making a theological statement whether you intend it to or not, and what that theological statement that your anxiety is making is this, it is saying that God cannot be trusted. God can't be trusted to take care of this issue and so I'm really agitated, you might say, about what the future holds for our country. Or I'm really agitated over what comes next in my medical treatment. Or I'm really agitated about what the future of my family looks like, etc. etc. etc., fill it in with your own blank. Anxiety says I fear the future, doesn't it? I am afraid of what may come. Well, what does that say about your perspective in that moment about the God that you claim to know? Is God sovereign or not? Is God wise or not? Is he good or not? Is he gracious or not?

Some people seem to like their anxiety. They live in it so much and they agitate and stir it up so much. It's hard for me to understand that mindset, but what we need to understand together here tonight is that Scripture is exceedingly clear on this point. Let's go back to that passage that we looked at from Philippians, Philippians 4, and see it from another perspective here. Did I mention that I'm really going to get back to Philippians? I've said that, yeah, never mind. Never mind. Philippians 4:6. You see anxiety set in opposition to trust, it's set in opposition to thanksgiving also. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." Be anxious for nothing.

There's probably, I haven't really thought through what I'm about to say so I'm just going to speak and you can assume there's a little bit of hyperbole here but it's probably true.

There is no Christian disposition, no disposition among Christians that is so easily excused than somebody who is living in a perpetual state of anxiety and we just accept that as though that were okay. Well, do you know what? It's not okay. If Jesus says three times don't be anxious and the grammar there in Matthew 6 has the idea stop being anxious and don't start again. Paul repeats it there in Philippians and you just realize that anxiety is the antithesis of biblical trust. How is it that we excuse ourselves so easily over this very point? There's no excuse for that.

Isn't it true that trust is at the core of any meaningful human relationship? You don't have a meaningful relationship with someone that you cannot trust. Well, how much more, then, your relationship with Christ and your heavenly Father? The God who has revealed himself in this wonderful inerrant book, who has made himself known as the sovereign God over creation, the defender and warrior who takes care of his people, their king, their prophet, priest and king, and this God has saved you and brought you in and has made himself known like this in his word, and we're going to look at the 66 books of the Bible and all that God has said about himself and say, "Eh, I don't think so. I don't think I can trust Him for this one. You see, this election's really important." Please. "This trial in life is really hard and there's just too much at stake and I'm..." No. No. We need to take ourselves in hand and remind ourselves of what we believe which is what we've been talking about all through the evening here tonight.

You know most of you Proverbs 3:5-6, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight." All your heart. All your ways. These issues of thanksgiving and trust are comprehensive. They are woven together. A thankful heart is a trusting heart and vice versa. And beloved, if I could just suggest this to you: it is righteous and it is especially pleasing to God when you trust him when you absolutely cannot see a solution at hand. When you can't figure out how this is going to work out for good, that's the time to trust him and not lean on your own understanding.

And so we've only dusted off this theme a little bit, but a trusting heart and a thankful heart is at the core of what it means to live a righteous life. Christ-centered righteousness, let me say this again as I start to close here, this Christ-centered righteousness of which we speak, to say it differently, what I intend to be synonymously, this Christ-centered sanctification of which we speak does not start with you trying harder. It doesn't start with, "I've got to read my Bible more. I have to pray longer." No. Those things have their place but it's more significant than that. You'll be drawn more to the word of God, you'll be drawn more to prayer when you have first thought theologically, thought about Christ, appreciated what he has done and you approach him in response to that rather than trying to be somebody who's trying to earn points by how much time and effort you give to those things. The righteousness of which we speak begins in your heart with a vertical dimension of gratitude and trust in a good Savior, a good God whose ways cannot be thwarted, and whose mercies to his children will never end.

So a righteous life is one that brings thanks and trust to our great Savior. So I ask you tonight, my Christian brothers and sisters, I simply ask you whether going forward from

this point on, whether you will cultivate that kind of thankful trusting heart in response to the Christ that you profess to know?

Let's pray together.

O great God of highest praise, glorify Your name through us. Our gracious Lord, we remember Calvary, we remember the tomb, the resurrection, the ascension. We remember You at the right hand of God, our brother in heaven interceding for us, having sent the Spirit to indwell us and to seal us so that our salvation could never be lost. Oh my! Our Lord, we thank You for all of that. The simplicity of those monosyllabic words are insufficient. Thank You for what You have done and we trust You as a result of it. If You have been for us when we were sinners like that, then certainly You will give us all things that are needed for life and godliness and our eternal well-being no matter what the earthly shape of circumstances may take. And so we thank You tonight, dear Lord, we trust You tonight, dear Lord, and we ask for the help of Your gracious Holy Spirit to seal those affections more in our heart, to develop them evermore that we might live righteously as you have called us to do. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

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